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TO CLIMB LA PEROUSE

Part one of an in-depth telling of the NZ Hunter Adventures expedition into the Cook Valley to climb La Prouse

BACKCOUNTRY HERITAGE

Rob Brown from the Backcountry Trust talks about our incredible network of remote huts and tracks, and the help they need

THE PERKS OF MISTAKES

Mitch Thorn talks us through some of the lessons he's learnt the hard way when it comes to hunting

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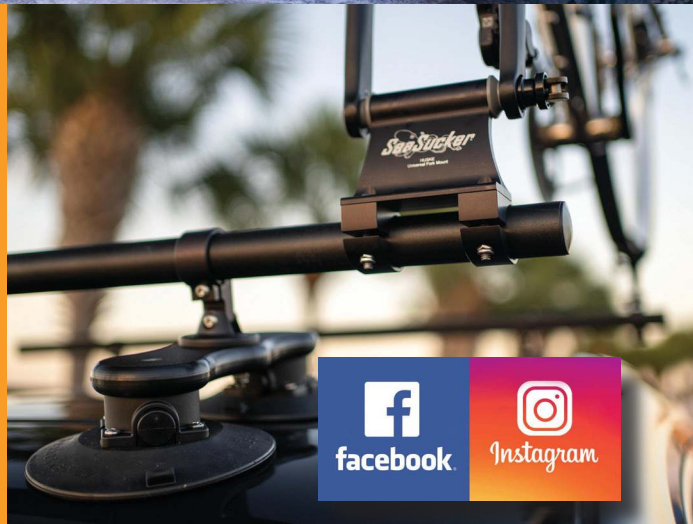


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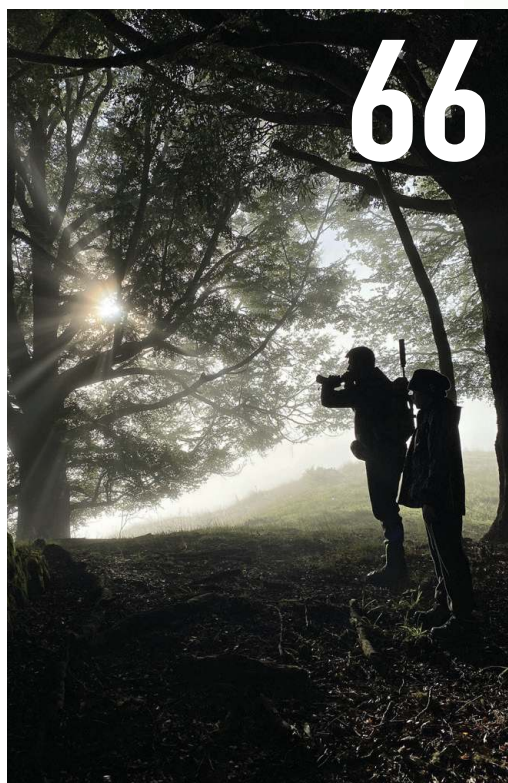
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COVER PHOTO

Peter Cammell beneath Lyttle Peak with his fantastic DS44 bull tahr

NZ Hunter welcomes articles

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

El Nino is back! The West Coast has been coping a pasting and we've had a dry and windy month on the East Coast so looks like we're going to get a windy spring which we haven't had for a few years.

The dust storms in the silt covered East Coast have been horrendous over the last few weeks. We've managed to get away from cyclone recovery long enough to film a couple of episodes for the TV Show before the stags dropped their antlers which was a bit of a relief!

The WARO land schedule issue has not been resolved, and it looks like the concessions people in the Department are not going to rethink their position.

This really does look like just another case of ideology and process driven bloody mindedness by some bureaucrats. This should have been addressed as part of overall deer management and the Te Ara ki Mua adaptive management framework, not in isolation. This and the wider WARO issue is now going to need a political solution, which we'll be strongly lobbying the incoming Minister to address.

The current Minister has announced a review of the 1953 Wildlife Act, which again will have huge ramifications for hunters and fishers. Garry Ottmann and I are heavily involved in this process, and we're striving to get pragmatic outcomes for both conservation and game animal management. Ecological reality clearly shows valued introduced species are here to stay and need to be managed for both their resource value and their harmful effects, and we need to ensure the new legislation reflect this. This is very much a case of we can have our cake and eat it to

The Game Animal Council has just released the paper done for them by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research on the effects of ungulates on carbon storage in our indigenous forests – see page 6. Surprise surprise, this has clearly shown that ungulates have little or no effect on intact forests, and that the best bang for our tax payers buck is to manage ungulates for biodiversity protection – exactly what we've been saying and the GAC, Fiordland Wapiti, Sika and Tahr Foundations have been trying to do. This totally contradicts

the paper on the same topic released by Forest and Bird, and shows their "science"

was basically dodgy. This is a real issue that has been getting serious legs lately, with all the talk by both some in the Department, the environmental NGOs and some politicians about nature based solutions to climate change and our carbon zero goals.

Some had been hoping they could get money to control ungulates out of the climate change budget, but this shows that belief is just smoke and mirrors.

Everyone needs to stop wasting time barking up the wrong tree and instead allow the Department to put that time and money into progressing working closely with the game animal sector to achieve real gains for both biodiversity and hunting.

The big news is the election only weeks away. This time outdoors people have some real opportunities the like of which we've never had before. There are some very clear and different policy positions from the various parties on conservation, game animals, hunting and firearms. Under MMP there is an opportunity to elect a government that will take a sensible, pragmatic direction on all the issues that are very dear to us and that will also have huge benefit for the country as a whole – even if some of them don't understand it! **So please make your choices on Election Day very carefully, and above all else make sure you do get out and vote!**

Greg

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Adam Cochrane** and **Gabriella Olsen**. Logos appeared on page 24, the Swazi advert, and page 47 the Hardy Rifle advert

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WWW.SIKASHOW.CO.NZ



Q&A

HI GREG

I'm a little confused by the rules around the new firearms registry at the moment.

I have a bare Tikka 223 I've owned since before the registry, but I want to finish it off by buying an aftermarket stock and fitting a suppressor. I haven't needed to register my guns yet. Will buying these items mean I then have to register this rifle and my others?

I'm just confused by what Te Tari Pureke mean by an 'arms item' when I looked on their website. Some mates have told me that they're going to hold off on buying any new firearms parts until they buy a new gun and have to go through and register everything then anyway. Can you please clarify what we can buy without triggering registration?

CHEERS, LIAM

HI LIAM

There is a bit of confusion about the terminology at the moment so don't feel bad about asking for some help!

A month or so ago we took some feedback to Te Tari Pureke/Firearms Safety Authority (TTP) about exactly this scenario. Our advertisers have had a tough time as people (through fear of having to register all their firearms if they buy any firearms part) sit on the fence until they absolutely need to register. This has had a major impact on sales as you can imagine as the firearms industry has the brakes thrown on it by confused consumers!

The TTP website currently states that one of the events which triggers the need to register your

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firearms before the August 2028 deadline is acquiring 'major parts'. A lot of people have taken 'major parts' or 'arms item' to mean components like suppressors, stocks and barrels. This is not the case, the only items that trigger a registration event of any relevance to a hunter are purchasing a whole rifle or an action (pistol frames and calibre conversion kits for pistols do need to be registered). Basically, any bits with a serial number! The definition of what arms items must be registered is "the action (frame, receiver, or upper receiver and/or lower receiver) of a firearm".

We are working with TTP to update their website to be more explicit in what you are allowed to purchase without the need to register and to advertise that to the hunting community. There are some changes coming so keep an eye out for the updated wording. A strong suggestion from us is changing the term 'arms item' to 'major firearms part' where it currently says 'From 24 June 2023, all firearms licence holders are required to register arms items in their possession'. TPP are working on this as we speak and didn't have things finalized to share in time for this edition, but the website should be updated by the time this magazine is on the shelves.

In the meantime, yes you can buy any firearm part you like except an action/receiver or complete firearm and not trigger a registration. This means suppressors, barrels, stocks, bipods, trigger assemblies, scopes, rings and bases, muzzle brakes, gunsmithing work, ammunition. Anything but an action receiver or whole new rifle (as it includes an action).

There are a number of other instances that will trigger the need to register your firearms, I would recommend checking out the TTP website to be sure. So get out there and do what you were going to do before June 2023 anyway - and keep supporting our advertisers with your rifle builds!

CHEERS, GREG



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INTRIGUE 02412 - 09/23



GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL NEWS

WRITTEN BY
TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER



'Intact' forests make up around 85% of New Zealand's indigenous forests, with the rest being 'successional' or regenerative

Research dispels concerns over deer and carbon

Over recent years there has been considerable debate about the impact of deer and other ungulates on the carbon storage potential of our indigenous forests, particularly as the pressure comes on for New Zealand to meet its 2030 climate targets.

In a bid to ensure that New Zealand makes the right investment decisions when it comes to game animal management and its objectives, the Game Animal Council commissioned Crown Research Institute Manaaki Whenua-Landcare Research to analyse the available science and report on the issue.

This has resulted in the recently published paper, *'Review of the likely magnitude and manageability of deer impacts on carbon stores in indigenous forests'*. The paper effectively dispels concerns that deer and other ungulates have a major impact on the carbon storage of our native forests.

Co-author of the paper and Principal Scientist in Ecosystem Ecology at Manaaki Whenua, Dr Duane Peltzer, emphasises that, *"the evidence for changes in carbon for intact forests caused by deer or resulting from their management is poor. Deer and other ungulate browsers have very little overall impact on the carbon storage of intact indigenous forests and in fact the carbon storage potential of our forests has been relatively stable for some time."*

"In some forest types the presence of deer may have a small negative effect on carbon stocks, while in other forest types deer will either make no difference or actually promote more carbon storage," says Peltzer. *"Overall, however, the impact of deer on*

indigenous forest carbon storage is pretty much neutral."

"Significant declines in carbon storage are far more likely to come from other factors such as possum browse and large-scale landscape disturbances caused by earthquakes, weather or pathogens. There is evidence that deer management can have an influence on carbon storage in successional forests recovering from such disturbances."

Where deer and ungulate management can have a significant impact, however, is in protecting and promoting indigenous biodiversity.

"While potential carbon gains from deer and ungulate management are limited and variable, there is far greater evidence to suggest gains can be achieved in biodiversity, particularly among highly palatable species in the browse tier," Peltzer explains.

The Game Animal Council is committed to achieving better management outcomes because we firmly believe this can achieve a win-win for both our native environment and hunting. However, with pressure on government finances the funding to achieve this over the foreseeable future will be tight. This makes it necessary to ensure the right decisions are made about how management is targeted and for what outcomes. The report makes it clear that those outcomes are mostly in improving biodiversity.

Management undertaken for biodiversity protection is not the same as it would be if you were trying to increase carbon storage. Where and how you undertake management and what animals are targeted will be quite different.

The good news is that Manaaki Whenua's research supports the site-based management strategy established by the Te Ara ki Mua Framework and which the Game Animal Council is



In some intact indigenous forests, the presence of deer increases carbon storage by promoting the growth of non-palatable species

committed to working with our partners and New Zealand's communities to achieve.

Review of the likely magnitude and manageability of deer impacts on carbon stores in indigenous forests is available on the Game Animal Council website.

Replacing Wildlife Act - an opportunity

Back in September the Government announced its intention to repeal and replace the 1953 Wildlife Act with legislation that better reflects modern principles of wild species management and protection.

Without-a-doubt the Wildlife Act, which is 70 years old, is out of date and no longer meets the requirements of 21st century New Zealand. The Game Animal Council agrees with the need to update it, not only to provide better protection to indigenous species, but also to properly address the unique place of game animals (deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs) as valued introduced species in New Zealand.

The way in which game animals have been managed (or not managed) over the past 70 years has been both schizophrenic and unsuccessful. Historically there has been an all-or-nothing approach to controlling deer, in particular. This has produced unnecessary conflict across parts of the hunting sector and with environmental advocates, and yet has not provided satisfactory long-term results for either indigenous biodiversity or game animals.

Replacement of the Wildlife Act presents us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to achieve a legislative framework that

promotes balanced management of valued introduced species. It is on this basis that the Game Animal Council is committed to playing a constructive role in the process to develop and refine the new legislation.

'Better Hunting' ready for launch

After two years of development, Better Hunting, the Game Animal Council's free online hunter training programme, is on the home straight and ready for launch at the upcoming Sika Show, 28-29 October.

Better Hunting will be FREE to use and includes 28 separate modules that address important aspects of hunting and backcountry skills such as outdoors safety, navigation, firearms safety, game animal management, hunting ethics and how and what to hunt. Each module will take between 10-20 minutes to complete and includes a high level of interactivity for learners.

I really want to thank all the individuals and organisations (including NZ Hunter) that have provided us with the resources, knowledge and expertise to develop Better Hunting. We also want to thank all the hunters that have helped us with the review and pilot testing phase, your assistance has been critical to getting the programme over the line.

The Game Animal Council will have Better Hunting available for hunters to try at the Sika Show, so head along to our stand and check it out!

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.



THE INFAMOUS LA PEROUSE

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

**THE COOK RIVER
PROTECTED BY A
NEAR-IMPASSABLE
GORGE, AND
FLANKED BY
RAZORBACK
RIDGES WITH SHEER
TUSSOCK WALLS
FOR "PASSES"**

The Cook Valley has long been a near-mythical place, with no tracks, no huts and no helicopter landings. Different in my mind somehow from the tall, gleaming Mt Cook that any of our millions of tourists can see from the comfort of their car, the river that bears the same name and drains to the west coast is shrouded in mist, scrub and mystery. Its aura is brought in to sharp relief by the tale of Ruth Adams, a climber who fell while attempting La Perouse in 1948 with Sir Edmund Hillary, guided by Harry Ayres and Mick Sullivan. This accident

precipitated the 'most arduous rescue operation in the history of the Southern Alps'. Needing dozens of men to cut a track up the notorious gorge and requiring many days on a stretcher to get her out, it has cemented itself in NZ backcountry lore as a lesson in the trials of meddling with the wild West Coast.

Gazing at the computer screen, with Greg waiting on the phone and this knowledge of the Cook running through my mind, the tipping point was a photo of the majestic La Perouse he had just sent through. I'd blown

Looking down on the first
big descent of the trip



it up to full screen so I could see every detail. The glacial outwash plain of the Cook Glacier with the Balfour Range thrusting up to the north, with even that impressive feature dominated by the main divide at the head, and the bulky shoulders of La Perouse looming from the east. **Huge boulders, tangled scrub, and the sun shining on one of New Zealand's most remote corners. It was tantalizing.**

We had a top-notch team on board: Greg, Willie, Emil plus West Coast legend Nigel Jordan and hugely experienced mountaineer Peter Cammell. The window was any time we could find in the next two months. The route strained credulity – Up Architect Creek, over Whales Saddle, up the Cook River, climb La Perouse, cross the Balfour Range into the Balfour Valley, cross the Hen and Chickens - and the Fox Range – and walk out in Fox Glacier 8-12 days later...

Greg asked "Are you keen?"

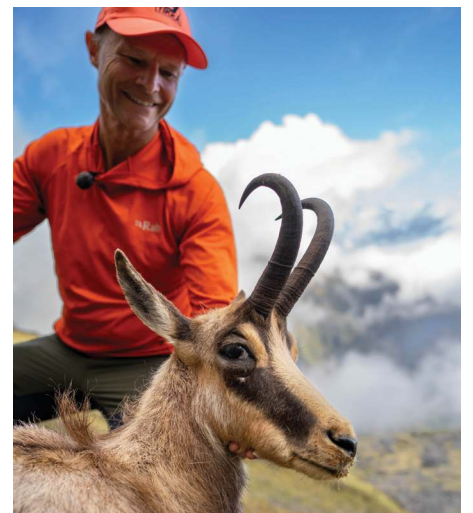
Keen, yes. Was I up to it? It was well and truly 50/50, but it was too good an opportunity to pass up. I said yes. Squashing all those doubts about fitness and toughness for an adventure of this scale. The sheer vertical metres involved were probably more than my last year of hunting combined! But having made the decision I knuckled down and trained through the summer heat, trying to scrounge together as much fitness as I



Pete with his first chamois, taken on day one and measuring 9^{3/8}"

could while we constantly monitored the weather.

A month went by, Christmas was only days away, and we committed. On Boxing Day I was to catch a plane and begin the most ambitious backcountry trip of my life – nervous was an understatement! **Fast forward all of the usual Duley packing and prep bedlam and we all stood around the vehicles at James Scott's hangar in Karangarua on a muggy December morning gazing up at the mighty West Coast ranges.** Our weather window was shrinking by the day and we opted to use James' services to shave a day off the start of





Steep country dropping
in to Architect Creek



Teamwork made the boulder-bash
up to the head basin easier

the trip. Despite the nagging feeling of cheating, these flights never get old – and as it turned out, if we'd used an extra day battling the Architect gorge in we'd have been stuck in the Balfour for a week!

A short hop saw us up on the edge of the clag, with an hour or so to climb before we could glass down into Architect Creek. We got in position to glass a large basin while the daytime thermals kept our scent out of it. Barely minutes into glassing I spotted a couple of chamois, and we soon spied another. The new Swarovski ATC got pulled out of the pack for the first of many times and much to our surprise we discovered that one of the bucks was quite reasonable! It almost felt too early, a potential shooter on day one?

The buck dipped out of sight into a gutter as we finished off a leisurely lunch waiting for some of the heat of the day to pass, did some dry-fire shooting coaching with Pete, then gathered our gear for the descent. **Not far into it we got a glimpse of the chamois bedded in a gutter, so changed tack to round the ridge below him, opening an angle to get the spotter on him.** This meant we had a bit of risk of the katabatic carrying our scent to him, but early in the trip we were playing things pretty fast and loose.

Greg's evaluation had him at 9 ½ inches, a great buck for Pete's first chamois (bigger

than a lot of hunters'!) so we quickly unstrapped the Aspire and got set up for a shot at only 250 yards. We had a big crew to hide, with Nige, Willie and myself staying right on the lip of the ridge to keep an

eye on the chamois and Greg, Pete and Emil over on a shooting position. They were a bit more exposed and the chamois must have caught a glimpse of some movement as he was certainly more alert. The tension ratcheted up as Pete got set up, but he made a perfect shot and the buck tumbled down the herb field even closer to us. Success on day one! Real meat for dinners and fortunately for Pete, chamois heads are quite portable ...

We had just the right amount of time left to get in position to glass down on to the flats for evening, but the clag had other ideas. We perched on all kinds of outcrops, patiently waiting for gaps in the cloud, but couldn't see much. We spied a chamois, but the gaps were just too frustrating to try and confirm if it was anything interesting and with about 600m of altitude still to drop we decided to just get moving.

We made it to a great campsite by a house-sized boulder without headlamps, just. We were certainly close to the action, only 300 yards from the flats, but hopefully we were far enough up the side of the valley enough to avoid scenting it and the big boulder would hide a bit of our noise and light.

Nige and I were up early out of the tent and clambered up atop our boulder to glass the valley, soon followed by Willie and Emil. A large group of kea soon found us and tried very hard to make off with

anything not tied down. As the sun hit us the 'seniors' tent of Greg and Pete graced us with a few stretches and groans, but as we'd seen nothing too interesting beyond a big one-horned doe with a kid, there wasn't any rush. **Long summer days made for very short nights, and the team had a fair idea of times from coming back through Whales Saddle last year.**

Eventually packed and moving, we made the decision to embrace wet boots to make the looming gorge travel easier, rather than trying to stick to one side and bush-bash. With the sheer wall of Whales Saddle looming above us, a constant reminder that we'd have to tackle that tomorrow, it was tough going through the jumbled slabs of slippery rock and challenging climbing. Despite that the sun was shining, we were embracing the water (it was actually nicely cooling) and just getting stuck in. the team worked well together, set a great pace and there was no stress.

We pushed up to a side basin for lunch and glassed a number of chamois, including a very wide buck only 350 yards or so away. He was extremely tempting, but his location held us back a bit. He was right atop a horrible rock face. If he dropped on the spot it would be a nightmare to retrieve him, and if he fell he very well could damage his horns. Not only that, we'd definitely miss our evening hunt in the head basin, costing us time. **So, he got to live another day, but he's nearly worth going back for another look...**

After lunch it was a hot and sweaty push up to the rock bivvy in the peak of the afternoon heat, not nearly as nice as the big boulder travel in my mind. A highlight



Pete's epic 44DS bull. A 12 year old, heavy-based monster

was Emil forgetting his walking stick nearly a kilometre behind us just as we broke out on the tussock. I shouldn't have found it so amusing but it was nice to see him sweating as much as me for a change!

The head basin was lush, just the kind of place to find a special old animal. The rock bivvy was pretty good too. Greg voted Nigel and I to be the trolls underneath which suited me just fine. While they scraped out some semi-level tent sites I ejected the tahr carcass from my ledge and set about levelling it out. I ended up with a really nice little camp! Nigel used the one further down that he'd built on previous trips.

As afternoon became evening we glassed for a good hour and then all of a sudden I saw a good bull. Just 300 yards below us on the terrace – who knew how he'd just arrived there like that, he must have been there the whole time!

At first glance with the 12x NL Pure binoculars I could see it had a lot of height. A huge bull, in body and horns, but clearly lacking tips. **He would've been a real monster if he'd had them, but still a very impressive animal to watch.**

We scurried around getting spotters set up and a platform for Pete. By the time we were ready the bull had dropped out of sight again, but before long he



stepped out atop a boulder, gazing over his kingdom. We glanced around to make sure we were all filming, Greg said "squeeze it off, when you're ready". Emil and I had just made eye contact and looked down to our cameras when Pete fired! I don't think I'd even hit record and Emil had only just! Pete, the quickest gun in the west, had done it again. **Another great shot from the Aspire that just drilled the bull, dropping him on the spot.**

We all headed down to check the bull out, and had plenty of light left for once!

Finding him was tricky in the boulder field but it turned out he'd dropped down in to a crevice under a boulder and crikey did he take some moving – he was a very large bull!

Settled across the boulder we got a better look at him. 12 years old with serious footrot in one hoof, it's unlikely he left this basin to chase nannies anymore. Interestingly he has some damage to one horn and as we cleaned it up later it looked as though he'd actually been shot in that horn, likely from aerial culling. Unfortunately they were allowed to target



Camp atop the rock bivvy,
Nigel and I were underneath

bulls there as we were in a National Park – let's hope we can get some decisions changed on that front!

Greg got the tape out and the impressive old warrior stretched it right out to 13 ½", with big 9" bases that gave him a Douglas score of 44.

13 ½ is a big bull to begin with, but the heavy brooming meant you couldn't help but wonder what he would've looked like with his tips intact – probably near 15! Either way it was one hell of a bull for Pete's first and I had to admit I was a smidgeon jealous at the time ... but while Pete hadn't hunted much he had certainly spent an incredible amount of time in NZ's mountains, so there was no doubt he'd earned it.

It was about then that we looked back to the rock bivvy and realised camp was very vulnerable to the kea who were currently

circling above, and we'd left several thousand dollars' worth of optics sitting on top of a 10 metre high rock! I opted to run back up and check it out while the guys butchered the bull. I pushed quite hard with visions of spotting scopes shattered on rocks and tents ripped from end to end. When I arrived there, dripping with sweat in the humid summer heat, seven suspiciously quiet kea were standing amongst our gear. Looking at me with heads tilted quizzically – but miraculously not a single piece of gear was out of place!

We had another balmy evening sitting atop our rock eating Back Country and telling stories, feeling very content with two awesome animals down only days in to the trip. I know it is a load off Willie's mind when we get an animal early on.

Settled on my rock ledge I had a brilliant night. Opening my eyes every now and then, watching Mt Lyttle, on the end of the Navigator Range, bathed in moonlight and crystalline stars above. I must have been quite cosy as I didn't notice the rain start in the wee hours. Nice and dry I was surprised to wake at 8am, with no noise of rain on a tent or leaves, I'd slept right through – and clearly we couldn't climb Whales Saddle in that so no one else was up either!

The drizzle eased and the others dried their tents out before leaving camp at 11.30. I had some great chats with Pete about pacing, as someone who has done an awful lot of walking with very mixed groups all around the world he was a big advocate for starting out nice and slow.

Greg, Willie and Nigel are all racers so having Pete meant there was another voice trying to slow the rest down! Starting out really slow made a big difference in my longevity through the day, and the climb up to Whale was relatively comfortable. I'd been quite worried about it in the lead up to the trip, but starting high at the rock bivvy and setting a more leisurely pace made it easier on Pete and I.

Cresting the top we discovered it was Nigel's fifth time on the saddle. Probably a record after Harry the Whale, except he did it with picks and shovels and not an ounce of carbon fibre! We sat a while trying to get a look into the famed Cook but clag hid it from us, there were only tantalising bits of the Balfour Range poking through the cloud.

Coming down into the Cook was extremely steep at the top. Near vertical



The spires of the Navigator Range
on the true left of the Cook

walls of wet tussock meant we had to be very, very careful. But again, a patient and supportive team kept it all together. We had a lot of clag hiding the route, and it may have helped with the exposure but it would have been a neat experience to be doing it in the sun with the vast valley falling away straight beneath us!

Near the bottom we got under the cloud and got a great look up the valley. It was an awesome feeling of achievement.

The Cook is one of the most remote and difficult to access valleys in New Zealand, and there I stood, now one of a very fortunate few.

We stopped and had lunch right on the banks of the river. The glacial silt loading was incredible, you couldn't see your toes in ankle deep water. After lunch the first section was full-on gorge travel, ducking in and out of the main river a few times – Pete a little more than ducking at one point!

As the sun left the valley floor we hit a nice side creek for a good section. It was big boulder travel, but not scrub bashing so we made good time. Except for the bit where we had to go caving to get through the boulders! I was pretty bloody knackered by this point.

We quickly glassed the faces on the true left as we worked our way up, but didn't really do it justice. A memory seared in my mind was finally reaching a terrace at the top of the



A section of the scrub bash to the moraine wall

moraine, almost a glade. It had fuschia and flax sprouting among the big boulders, **and there was a gap at the eastern end which perfectly framed La Perouse shining in the last of the light as the sun set somewhere far behind us over the Tasman.** The striking white against a purple twilight, and the blessed cool after a monumental day of very tough travel, made for a special moment.

After an hour of the worst scrub bashing yet I witnessed the view that had motivated me to join the team right back at the beginning. Standing on the lip of the moraine with the late alpine twilight falling around us the snowfields of the main divide and La Perouse herself

gleamed in the alpine glow. Despite being completely exhausted, I felt great satisfaction at being one of the select few who have walked in and witnessed that particular vista.

After yet more scrub bashing and a steep descent down the moraine wall we finally stepped foot on the valley floor, fortunately close to a bench that made for a perfect campsite. That night Nigel and I just crawled under the fly. Me personally, I was too buggered to bother with the tent!

Those of you who have seen the TV Show know what to expect next issue. But if you haven't seen it, buckle up...



The view that dragged me all the way in to one of the most remote valleys in New Zealand



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MORE INFO

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PROFESSIONAL HUNTER? PEST CONTROL

WRITTEN BY ~ JOHNNY BISSELL

Following Joseph Peter's article on being a hunting guide in the last issue, this time we are focusing on a smaller scale - small furry things with sharp pointy teeth to be exact.

In recent years the Predator Free 2050 movement in this country has been both expansive and intense, and is continuing to be so. All over the country, predators are hunted for sport, profit, conservation, and protection of agriculture, silviculture, and biodiversity.

THE ROLE

So, what is a predator you might ask? Well, it starts with mice, and includes mustelids (stoats, ferrets and weasels), rats, feral cats, hedgehogs and 'possums, to name the key players. I will note that while wallabies are not predators, they are becoming an increasing threat. In recent years there has been a huge amount of government money poured into pest control, and into biodiversity growth and protection, hand in hand with a huge upswell of community and volunteer effort. The result has been a surge of new conservation work, creating

jobs for people to carry out various aspects of the mahi. Success requires the effort of many people and hard work. Across the country, new, established, or growing projects are ongoing. There is pest control activity taking place almost everywhere, from bush areas close to major urban centers to remote locations and inner cities. For example, Predator Free Wellington started in 2018 and now lists itself as covering 30,000 hectares and approx. 70,000 households, covered by no less than 58 trapping groups! That is an incredible amount of effort. Predator Free Mirimar Peninsula is a well-known and very successful project and Capital Kiwi recently facilitated the release of over 50 North Island brown kiwi back into the hills above Wellington. **Native species spill over from the Zealandia fenced sanctuary into these predator-trapped bush areas and gardens.** Wellington is now starting to sound and look very different from when I grew up there. It is amazing! And that is just one city!

So, you like the idea of being out in the bush all day, saving and connecting with

nature and living the dream. That's great, but as with Joseph's article, it ain't all birdsong and butterflies as they say. That is not to say it is a bad thing, but as with everything in life, it is always better to go in with your eyes open. When it comes to predator hunting, it really boils down to two key areas:

- 1. Biodiversity asset protection**
(habitat and species)
- 2. Commercial asset protection**
(agriculture, silviculture, carbon and biosecurity)

When it comes to conservation, one of my little sayings is that there are only three types of people. Killers, cuddlers and counters. Plus, support people of course. Or you can be a mix of the three. In this article, we will be dealing with the killing or 'rest in peace' division, though you may wish to explore the others as well.

If you want to get into the game of threatened species protection, you can expect to be dealing with a number of different predator species and using several different methods, for example traps, toxins and shooting. There is no shortage of variety.

My specialty is trapping and I love it! For me, it has become the ultimate form of hunting incredibly cautious and savvy animals. I started by wanting to catch more, then moved to targeting the

ones that wouldn't be caught by usual means, and then from there to training and mentoring others in that space. Predators are the wariest of them all. **I have huge respect for the species and individuals that I hunt and I never stop learning.** The bonus for me is that I have real payback in feeling like I am helping to make the world a better place. One stoat at a time! It may sound poetic, but let me tell you about the warm feeling I get in the evening after catching a kiwi-killing ferret during a project that made all the difference. So, there can be genuine real reward, alongside the potential endless grind and sheer bloody hard work.

So, am I selling it to you? I hope so. This is a great line of work if you love the outdoors. But there is no free lunch. It comes at a cost. It can involve time away from home and camping out, so you need to consider your current personal situation. The good news is that because the work everywhere is so constant, you can often find employment in a project where you can be home most nights. If you want to find the dream job though, you might need to be prepared to move to a new area. The more willing you are to do this, the faster you will find the job for you or progress in your career.

Regarding the commercial side of this game, the big player for many years has been 'possum control. In particular, the fight to rid New Zealand of Bovine TB (BTB), of which the 'possum is vector number one. **The amount of effort and dollars that have been thrown at this is mind boggling.** Big companies have been built up purely on BTB control and landscape-scale possum reduction. The results speak for themselves, with only a small number of reactive herds remaining in the country. Many regions are now in a monitoring phase. The spin-off for conservation and biodiversity from all this work has been equally significant. In areas where OSPRI has reduced its programme, Regional Councils are stepping in to maintain progress made. Smart move as it is always cheaper to maintain than to start again from scratch.

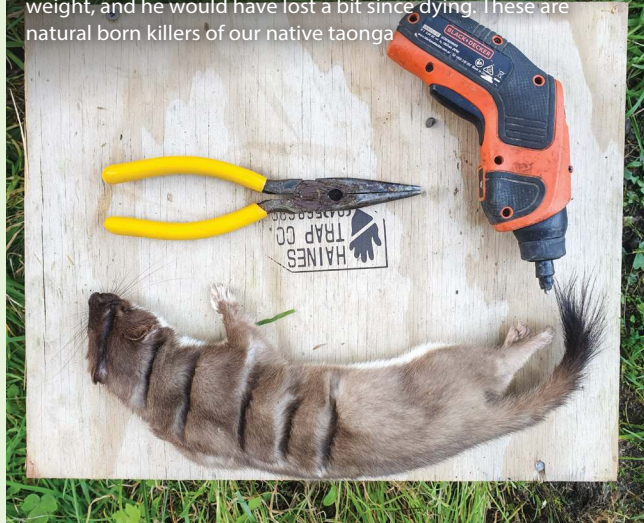
For a long time, there were jobs available where you would primarily be responsible for filling bait stations, setting chew cards, and placing leg hold traps. Some

Summertime evening rabbit work



Some new tech is proving to be really effective. Good people will always make good kit even better through the way they use it

A very big male stoat on a DOC250 kill trap box. 480 grams weight, and he would have lost a bit since dying. These are natural born killers of our native taonga



A couple of proud conservation cadets showing their latest trophies. Onya girls! There is a lot of hunting in what we do

people love this sort of work. **As the program rolls back, companies have diversified to safeguard their business.** They often get involved in wildling pine removal, pine and native seedling protection, and wallaby control. Some are also now dipping their toes in

the conservation pond, given the amount of funding out there and the long term opportunities in this space. Predator Free isn't going away. If you are seeking employment with a larger company, the array of job responsibilities available to you is often more diverse than it was



There is a saying that people who work in conservation get paid in scenery and sunsets. Not a bad wage really on good days



A newly hatched kiwi and why we do what we do. If you remove enough of the bad stuff, the good stuff can take of itself. I wear the badge of 'Predator Hunter' with pride



Predators are the wariest of all the species I hunt. I have huge respect for the individuals that I hunt and I never stop learning

five to ten years ago. Let's assume that you have decided that you want to get involved in pest control. What should you do? My advice to people starting out is that you need to consider what your passion is and then think about what you can physically do and find something that ideally combines the two. In the beginning, the best thing you can do is be employed and not contracting. You need to learn the ropes first and running a business is a whole 'nother layer to master. **A good company will train, equip and mentor you as you learn those ropes.** Let's talk about loyalty. It's disheartening when good employees leave just as they become productive after all the effort and investment put into them. Don't let that happen. The conservation industry is a small one, so never forget that people talk, and reputations are hard to gain and easy to lose and near impossible to get back. You don't need to stay ten years, but stay long enough to grow your skill set and return the investment made in you.

LOOKING FOR A JOB

So, when looking for a job:

1. **Do your research into the company you are looking at. What is their reputation?**
2. **Be honest with them about where you want to get to and ask about improvement opportunities within the company.**
3. **Look at the calibre of their staff and the way they are kitted out and presented.**

So, who should you go with? Well, it depends on where you want to end up. It really comes down to public or private. With public, there was a time when I would have said that DOC was the place to start out, and in many ways they still are, but many positions in the Department are increasingly less involved in actual field work and more in oversight and process. That is OK if you want to learn the really important background to much of what we do, but go in with

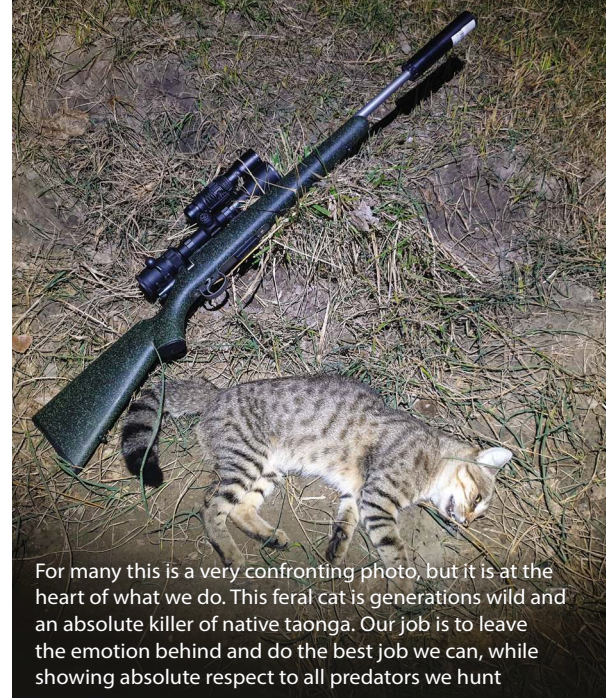
eyes open. What I would suggest is that you check carefully exactly how much field delivery work a role would involve, if being 'out there doing it' is what you really want to do most of. Some of the entry level Biodiversity Ranger or project specific positions can still involve plenty of field work, and the office comes more as you advance upwards. Just check once again, that what you want to do is actually what the position entails. **There is no doubt that working for DOC can see you operating in some of the most spectacular backcountry we have, but any Government position comes with a lot of process and more than the occasional meeting.**

Regional Councils have field teams as well and, like DOC, can be a very good employer when it comes to training and upskilling new staff in many aspects of what we do. If you aren't sure about exactly what you want to specialize in, then these two options will give you enough exposure to a variety of things that will help you take the next step. Smaller councils usually have minimal involvement in this sort of work with the odd exception, but you will want to be exposed to variety and bigger scale usually.

When it comes to private and community based work, there are a huge number of opportunities, from community programmes, right through to large commercial operations. **As I have said, look at what they do and look for variety and growth and learning opportunities, and focus on the opportunities that will feed in to your end goal.** So, if you really like the idea of threatened species protection, then don't take a job that just involves filling 'possum bait stations and nothing else. Some of that is fine, but look for what else is available. Another thing I would



Baited and loaded up, ready for another day on the hill and at the 'office'



For many this is a very confronting photo, but it is at the heart of what we do. This feral cat is generations wild and an absolute killer of native taonga. Our job is to leave the emotion behind and do the best job we can, while showing absolute respect to all predators we hunt

suggest is looking at the funding model feeding a community organisation project and its duration. It may be year to year and uncertain, but the length the project has been established for will also help give some assurance. Don't be afraid to ask them what their future funding model looks like and about job security. It demonstrates you are interested and strategic. Another thing to note is that even a year or two with a good project might still be a good move if they are the right project and fit your learning process. If the funding stopped for whatever reason, you will still have grown where you needed. If you want absolute job security, then national and local government are safer.

GAIN EXPERIENCE

So, what else? Well, you might need to gain experience, dip your toe in the water and prove yourself. A great way to do this can be to volunteer in a local trapping group or even offer to do volunteer work for a company that appeals. Then you and they can check each other out. Don't be afraid of working for nothing a few times. It is OK to ask to cover fuel costs, but people are looking for good attitude. I always want to employ the attitude then train the person. You can't train in attitude. There might be health and safety issues that prevent this happening, but people like people who reach out. If you are still at school, ask if they need anyone to clean the bikes after school or whatever. Demonstrate focus, ambition, drive and



There is a lot of talk around new technology in this space, but some of the old tech is still some of the best

integrity. And humility.

There are now good conservation projects led by hunters where you can volunteer. The Sika Foundation is a good example if you live nearby, or just find your closest local Predator Free community group.

Another good option is to do a training course. DOC has run a very good trainee ranger course in Nelson for a number of years. As part of it, the trainees get placed around the country with DOC offices and get the chance to learn, grow and experience conservation work. This is a great opportunity and most trainees find employment within the Department afterwards, which makes it worth considering. There are courses such as the excellent conservation cadets course run in Tauranga by the Bay Conservation Alliance. Cadets attend the course for three months and, during that time, are paid to attend. They get exposed to a wide variety of types of conservation mahi delivered by industry leaders, and it



An intake for the Bay Conservation Cadets course. Out there doing it and learning as they go

is a mix of classroom and field. Having a course like this on your CV will be a strong seller in subsequent job interviews.

WHAT DOES A DAY LOOK LIKE

A typical day in this business starts at 7am or earlier if you need to travel further away. Sometimes, you may have to spend a few nights away from base while on a work trip, camping out or staying in a hut. Assuming it's a day trip, you will reach the base and begin to prepare your gear for the day. Make sure you don't forget your boots! It is beneficial to be well-organized and methodical. A checklist may come in handy. Your gear will most likely be ready and charged from the last day's work. After the day's work and safety briefing, you will hit the road. You will often be working with a team but will work alone for the day. You might be:

- » **Monitoring pest abundance (chew cards, wax tags, trail cameras, tracking tunnels etc)**



One of the great things about working in conservation is the number of people you meet, who you wouldn't have otherwise. I have made so many friends through what I do

- » Putting out toxin for rats or 'possums
- » Servicing predator kill traps. Checking, clearing, re baiting etc
- » Leg hold or cage trapping daily checks
- » Track cutting and marking
- » Hunting on the job
- » Weed control
- » Carrying in new traps to replace old ones
- » Setting up new lines and trapping networks

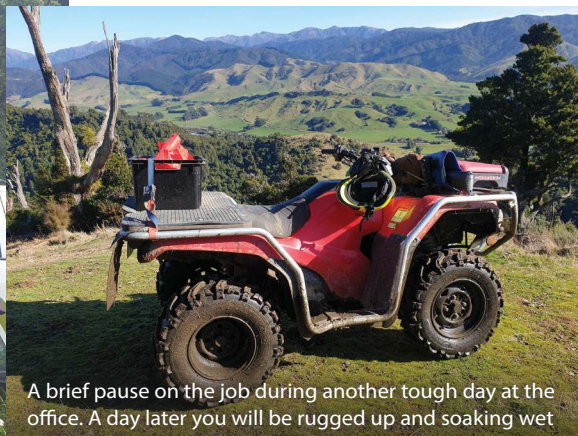
These are just some examples and there is plenty of other mahi that you might end up doing. At the end of the day, you will roll back into base, tired but satisfied,

and if it's been tough, sometimes a little relieved. You will put gear away and make sure it is ready to use the next day, plus any data recording needed, before heading home. Then rinse and repeat.

Because you are a fit capable team, you will also sometimes get called in to assist with other work streams too. Protected species monitoring is one example.

Getting paid to sit up and listen to kiwi is a pretty cool sideline.

You will have the opportunity to experience almost every mode of transportation available to passengers, including 4WD, two and four-wheeled motorbikes, helicopters, boats, and of course, a lot of walking. You'll become



A brief pause on the job during another tough day at the office. A day later you will be rugged up and soaking wet

more physically fit in the process. There will be a lot of hard work and repetition, as well as adventure and job satisfaction.

There will be good and bad weather, good and bad people, and good and bad days.

The one thing that's certain is that there will be plenty of variety. Even if you're doing the same work, no two days will be the same. Nature is unpredictable, but that's what makes it so exciting. If you're passionate about the outdoors, you might want to consider a job as a predator hunter. I've been doing it for years, and I can't recall a day when I didn't wake up feeling eager to go to work. **If it's in your blood, it's much more fulfilling than working in an office.**

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WEST COAST WANDERING

WRITTEN BY ~ BAXTER WILSON

After a long drive from Blenheim with two good mates Heath Forsyth and Hayden Pickering on the Thursday night, waking up Friday to a clear bluebird day got the excitement levels fizzing

It was just a quick trip down the road to meet James Scott at the hanger, gear was loaded in the helicopter and off we went.

The sound of the chopper slowly faded away and before we did anything else we were digging around getting binos out to see who could locate the first bull. Finally we loaded our gear into the hut and got set up properly.

Home for the next few days was a nice wee 4 bunk hut on a flat in the valley floor, with big bluffs all around and lots of steep country to explore. A decent dusting of snow was still hanging around keeping the temperature pretty chilly.

Evening brought on a wee climb up to a spot we called "the lookout". Within five minutes of being behind the glass we spotted a mob of bulls, with a couple definitely worth closer inspection. More glassing revealed another mob in a tight

wee creek with one bull standing out from the rest. Rifles were rushed to get set up and the spotter on him gave us indications he was a really good mature bull.

I ranged him then settled behind the gun ...'bang' ...the first shot missed and he disappeared into the monkey scrub. With a bit of head scratching as to what happened, followed by some discussion with Heath and Hayden we watched the footage to see the shot went high. Our talking was put to a halt quickly when Heath spotted the same bull again. He had climbed higher into the creek. This time the long range rig was dialled up and "bang" high again, we had wound the turret too high! He was one lucky bull that day. It was time to head back to the hut.



Day two was another cracker. The morning coffee was rudely interrupted by a good bull spotted 350yds behind camp watching us from the scrub.

After a quick assessment through the spotter he disappeared but we saw enough to know he was a shooter with age rings stacked up the bases. We threw packs on and headed off up river behind camp. We walked and glassed with not a lot seen until we were moving down the river back to camp when Heath spied a bull feeding on a face 500 yards away. A quick stalk put us into 300yds. One shot from the 6.5PRC had the first bull of the trip down. A 10 year old battler with broomed off tips and just scraping 12 inches with a wicked skin. I was rapt with my bull. A few photos and off came the skin before it was time to head back to camp for lunch.

Mid-afternoon arrived and off up the "lookout" we went again. We had only walked 50 yards from camp when Heath decided to have a quick look back on the face where the early morning bull had been and bingo, there he was laying on a rock tucked away in the scrub soaking up that afternoon West Coast sun. Time for a change of plans. We quickly boosted up to a small knob that put us inside 350yds of the bull. Spotter on, phones recording and Heath settled in behind the 7mm Rem Mag. **One good shot and down he went. We scrambled up through the scrubby face to find him laying there, with another awesome skin 12 years old and 13 inches of horn.**

We took photos, sat in the sun for a bit then removed the skin - another floor rug in the making. Day two was definitely going to be one of those days that you remember for years to come. A cold beer was well earned and enjoyed that night.

Day three was our last full day, the mission was to get Hayden a bull and complete the trifecta. The weather had turned and we persisted in the constant drizzle and fog all day to be rewarded late in the afternoon with a mob of bulls spotted across the valley in a good position. We hurried down the face into the valley floor, bumping a good bull in the scrub along way that was close enough to poke a stick at. We locked eyes for a few seconds before he bounded off into the monkey scrub and was gone.

We hustled up a small side creek and into position while the weather tried its best to spoil our stalk.

The large spring mob of bulls walked out onto a bluffy face at 200 yards and Hayden dropped the oldest bull with a



A 10 year old battler with broomed tips and just scraping 12 inches with a wicked skin. I was rapt with my bull



Our home for four days



Heath's awesome bull - 12 years old and 13 inches of horn



Hayden on the board as well - 8 years old and measuring 12^{1/2} inches

well-placed shot.

Instead of falling into an easily recoverable position he decided to hang up on a wee ledge mid-bluff. We scrambled around and managed to find a safe way up and down to retrieve him.

Another old bull at 8 years old and measuring 12.5 inches. To say the boys were stoked was an understatement, we had ticked off a good bull each and all old battlers too - and in some of the most spectacular country you could set foot in.



It was a wet trudge returning to camp, with an unplanned swim in the river on the way back that gave the boys a good laugh at my expense. The beers were finished off that night in rapid fashion and sleep was well and truly upon us.

Day four dawned clear and right on time the buzz of the deep purple 500 woke the valley. We loaded up and before we knew it we were off down the valley with three good bulls and a ton of memories for years to come.



The only thing to do now is to plan the next trip and get back into those mountains.



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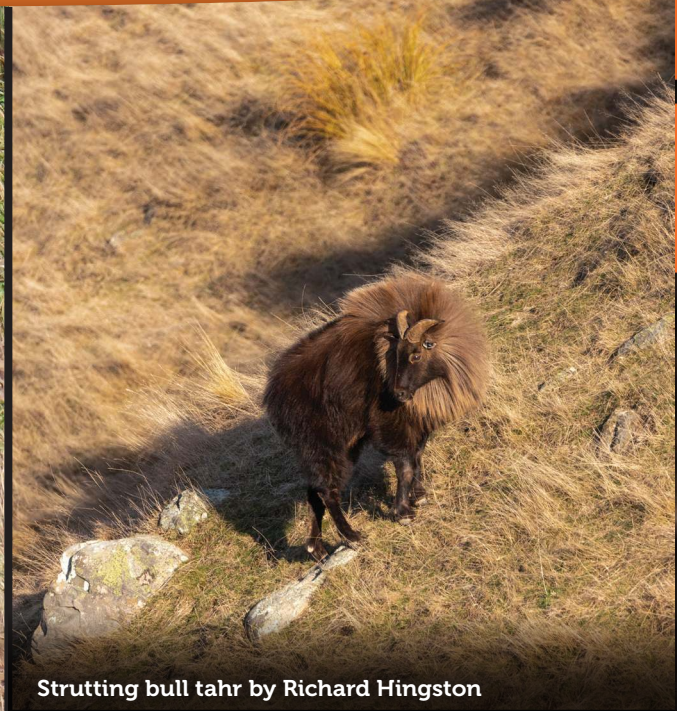


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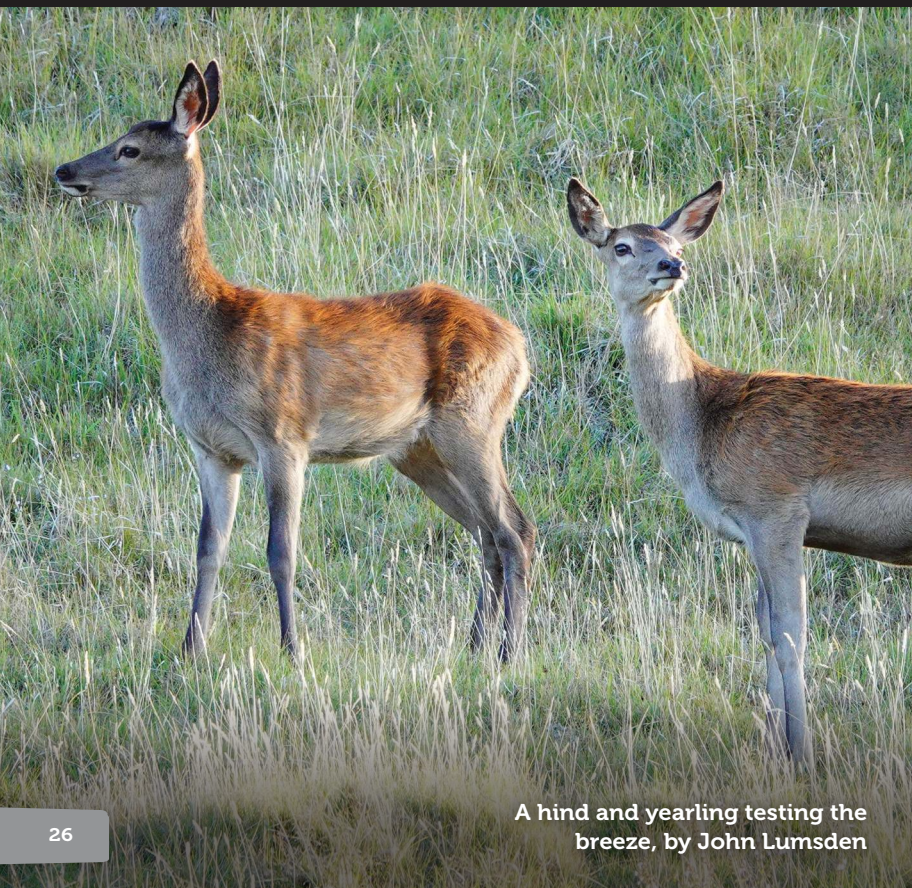


WINNER

A sight many hunters never see, a 6-point Urewera Rusa with hind and fawn. A rare capture by Cam Squires



Strutting bull tahr by Richard Hingston



A hind and yearling testing the breeze, by John Lumsden



Greg Hill - The hind had her fawn with her and was very cautious stepping out of the manuka into a clearing to feed



A bull with an injured horn by Thomas Forbes



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PHOTOGRAPHY THINGS A HUNTER MUST KNOW PART FIVE

WRITTEN BY ~ MIKE SPRAY

A few years back, deep in the North Island Kaimanawa wilderness, I shot a magnificent Sika trophy stag

He was a master stag with a thick, shaggy mane and a large set of antlers with eight polished white points. It was a very proud moment for me, and the mounted head that hangs on the wall in my house continues to rekindle fond memories all these years later.

Having left the stag hanging overnight, I returned to the carcass the following morning, took out my old Instamatic camera and posed alongside my trophy while my mate took a few photos.

Regrettably, when I look at the photos today, I simply cringe. The muzzle of the rifle I had leaning against the animal points right at my head. The bolt is open, but that is little consolation. The head of the master stag, which I had cut off the night before, was put back on the body to make it look like it was still attached. The stag has rigor mortis and lies as a stiff carcass. It looks grotesque. The photos are terrible, and they continue to cause me much embarrassment today.

My eight-point stag won New Zealand's prestigious Sika Show in 1995. It is terribly unfortunate that I did not have any decent photos to publish alongside the article I wrote for the hunting magazine. I am afraid the editor did not think much of them, and he would only use a photo of the mounted head taken at my home some months later. Even worse, my article was published in the subsequent book 'The Sika Hunters' by Alex Gale, and again I scratched for a decent photo of my trophy.

Photographs are the best way of capturing memories of the hunt and the best way to celebrate and share the experience with family and friends. They are an important part of storytelling and the time taken to construct the perfect photo is time well spent.

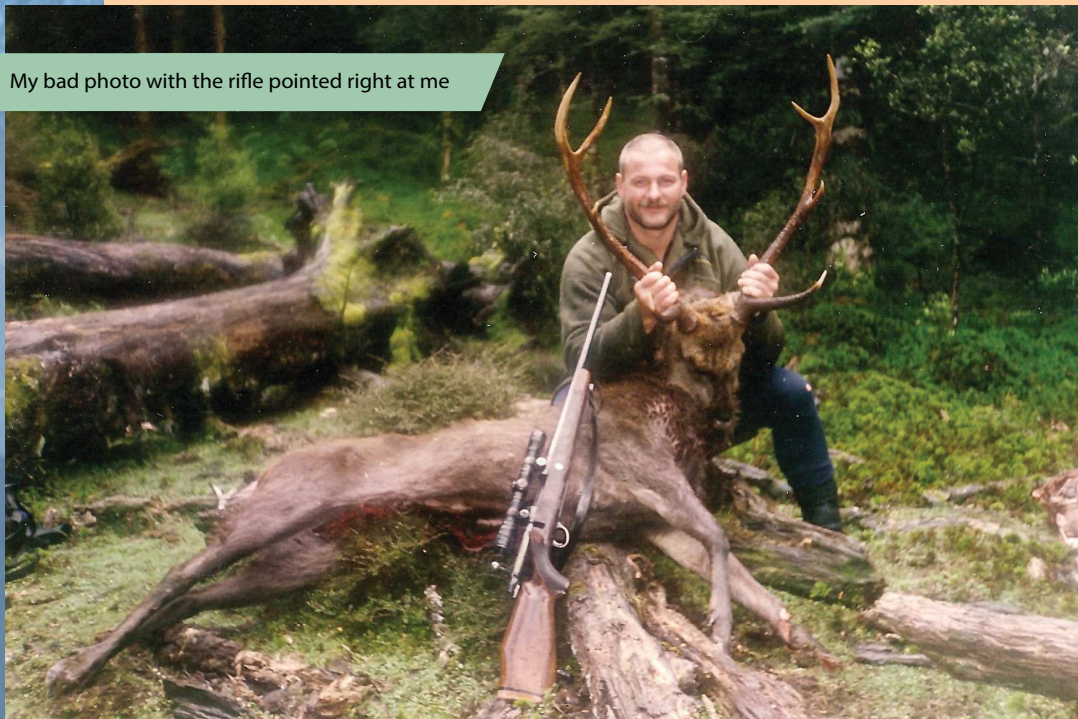
Magazine editors carefully select photos to publish in their hunting magazines. Each photo is scrutinised to ensure it conveys the story and will not offend other hunters or non-hunters. Editors look for the animal to be displayed in a respectful way, where there is not

too much blood and gore and where the firearm is shown as unloaded and pointing in a safe direction. Editors may crop the photo to frame the image better, however, it is better for the photographer to compose the photo well in the first place giving due consideration to the little things that will make the photo the best it can possibly be.

The purpose of this article is to provide you with some helpful tips on how to compose your photo and apply basic photography principles, and to suggest how you might best demonstrate respect for the animal and safe handling of firearms through your photographs. Applying these tips will ensure you don't end up with unusable photos of that unforgettable trophy.

TAKE TIME TO GET THE PHOTO RIGHT

Problems will occur when photographers rush the shot. The light might be fading, urging you to get on with field dressing, however, it is important to allocate the time to get it right. The more photos you take over time, the more you will know and practice what works. This experience will mean you'll need less time to set up the shot. You spend enough time on the hunt, so



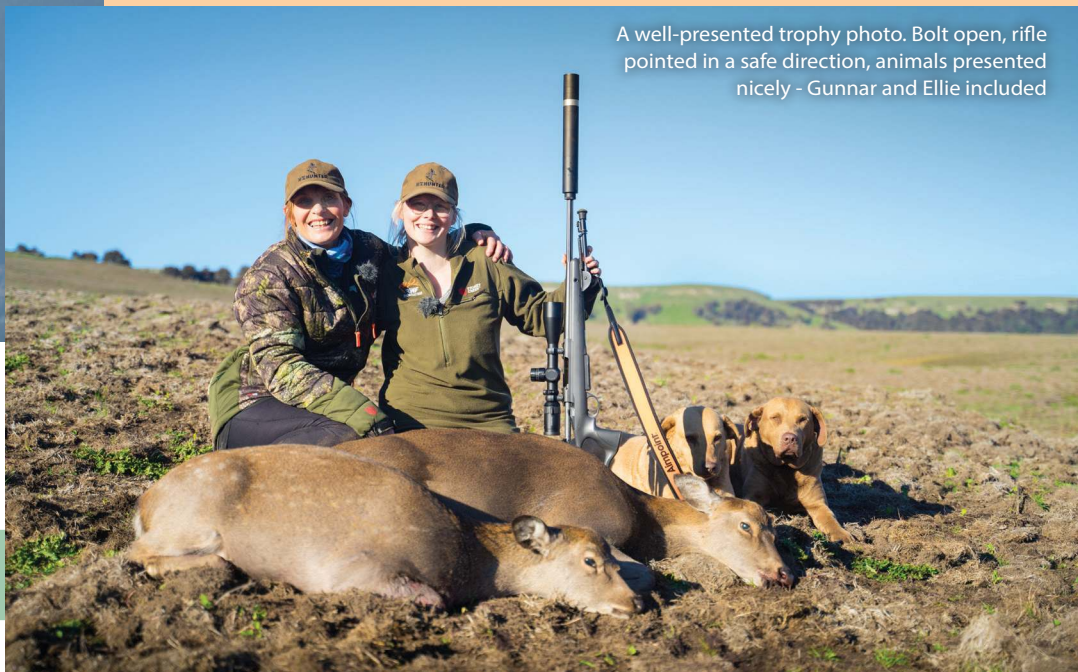
Be mindful of where the muzzle is pointing in photos with firearms. Rules 1 and 2 - 'Treat every firearm as loaded' and 'Always point a firearm in a safe direction'. So don't point it at yourself or lean on the muzzle

spend enough time on the photographs. Remember that this will be your only opportunity to take the photos and get them right.

POSITION THE ANIMAL

Pose the animal in such a way that the antlers, horns or tusks are prominent.

Position the animal so that the legs fold underneath the body and it is sitting as normally as possible. Position the animal as respectfully and naturally looking as you can. Place the animal sideways to the landscape and ensure the whole animal is in the frame. Prop its head with a stick behind the ear or hold the neck up by grasping it at the back of the neck. Don't grasp the animal by the antlers or horns, this will make the trophy look much smaller. Do not sit on the animal, as this is disrespectful. Contrast the antlers or horns against a background such as a blue sky, clouds or another contrasting background. **Take time to find a good background that captures the terrain and habitat.** Take the photo in the environment it was harvested, not on the back of the truck or hanging in the shed.



Properly posing and positioning your animal is best done when the animal is still warm. Leaving photos for the next day is risky because overnight rigor mortis and degradation will lessen the chance of a natural-looking photo.

Carry a cloth or wet wipes to clean blood away from the body, mouth and nose. If you do not have wipes, rub some soil onto the blood or use some handy fern to cover it up. Tuck the tongue into the mouth or simply remove it.

Clean yourself or the person in the picture by removing bloody clothing and washing your hands, arms and legs. Hide gunshot wounds and cover spots of blood on the ground. With stags and bucks, try to tip the head forward so the antlers are roughly perpendicular to the camera so that you can see the whole length of antler.

COMPOSE THE PHOTO

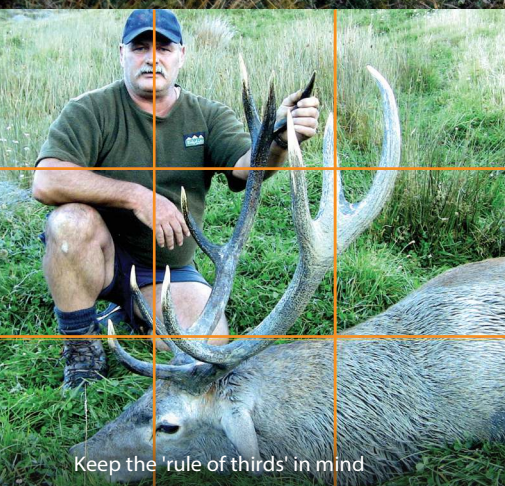
Take time to look through the camera from different angles to frame the photo. Sit on the ground, allowing the animal to look its natural size. Don't stand so you tower over the animal, and for anyone in the photo, take off their bulky clothing. This will help make the animal look its real size. When possible, get low when taking the photo, even lie down on the ground. At least take the photo from the same level. Place the firearm behind the animal, not in front of it. Take several photos from different angles.

Digital photography is inexpensive, and it really doesn't matter how many photos you take, so the more, the better.

When framing the picture don't cut off any parts of either the animal, the hunter,



Position the animal for some shots showing the landscape it was taken in



Keep the 'rule of thirds' in mind



Be mindful of blur in the photos, you may need to use a tripod



Get down behind the animal, position it tidily and tuck its legs away - unlike this photo!

or the firearm. Don't have things like a tree branch that looks like it is growing out of the side of the hunter's head. Remember, positioning the camera close to the subject will make it appear bigger.

RULE OF THIRDS

The best position for the animal is applying the rule of thirds. This means breaking up the frame into thirds, both vertically and horizontally. Place the body of the animal along the bottom horizontal line and the neck and head on either the first or second vertical line depending on which way it is facing.

USE A TRIPOD AND SELF-TIMER TO AVOID BLURRED PHOTOS

There is a risk, especially in low light, when using a handheld camera or phone to blur the image from camera movement at a low shutter speed. Using a tripod or some other solid base and self-timer will increase

your photos' sharpness. Make sure you know how to operate the self-timer function on your camera or phone before you go on the hunt. A self-timer will also allow you to take high-quality photos and pose in the photo when you are by yourself. A lightweight accessory known as a 'gorilla pod' can attach your camera to handy surfaces like a tree branch or be used as a tripod.

LIGHTING AND CONTRAST

The best light for photography is early morning and late afternoon, coinciding with the best times to hunt. Bright sunlight makes for difficult lighting conditions. To avoid shadows over the face, remove caps, hats and sunglasses. Bare hands may cause a glare in the photo and be distracting. Activate your flash, if you have one, to lighten up dark areas and shadows or to shine a light at the subject to increase the light. Get the sun behind the camera, lighting up the subject. Avoid backlighting that can silhouette your subject.

Add colour diversity to your photo. Colourful leaves or foliage can add interesting colour to the background or foreground, adding character and balance to the photo.

CLEAN UP THE SURROUNDINGS

Clear away or trim branches or long grass that may block part of the animal, but make sure it stays looking natural. Avoid having manmade objects in the background such as buildings, power poles or fences. Clear away clutter from your photo like unwanted items such as the camera pouch or day pack.

DEMONSTRATE SAFE FIREARMS BEHAVIOURS

If you have your firearm in the photo, make sure it is completely unloaded with the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, which includes not pointing it at the camera. Open the

action before taking the photo. Never lean your firearm up against a tree or any other object. Leaving your hi-vis apparel on will add colour to your photograph and model safe practice.

RECORDING THE HUNT

If your camera or phone has video capability, set it to the highest resolution, frame yourself and the animal, and talk through the hunt, ensuring the best audio as possible, mentioning details of the stalk before and after the shot. Doing this while it is fresh in your mind will be far more interesting, particularly if you intend to write an article for a magazine or club newsletter.

TAKING PHOTOS WITH YOUR MOBILE PHONE

Most of your hunting photos will now likely be taken with your mobile phone. The newer models of phone have very good cameras which can produce high-resolution photos, suitable for publications. These cameras have many camera modes, such as panorama, macro, portrait, and night modes. They also have manual overrides enabling you to select

A photo that tells a good story. Rifle safe, hi-visibility clothing and a cleaned animal. From Luke's trip to Finland with Sako, not a New Zealand Whitetail unfortunately!



your desired aperture, shutter speed, and manual focus, or for those of you less technical photographers, you can simply take photos in auto mode. However the phone camera is set up, you will need to apply the same principles of photography as described above.

HIGH RESOLUTION PHOTOS

If your photos are to be published in a magazine, make sure you use the highest resolution setting on your camera or phone. Photos need to be at least three megabytes and preferably greater.

Your hunting photos will last you a

lifetime, and they will be there for future generations of family and friends to view and enjoy. Although digital and mobile phone cameras have many automatic functions that will ensure a technically good photo, the camera will not compose the photo nor ensure you demonstrate both respect for the animal and safe behaviour with firearms. For your photo to be the best it can be and have the best chance of being published, take the necessary time and thought to compose your photo well. The more you practice, the better you will get. **By doing this, you will contribute hugely to the reputation of hunting as a legitimate, safe, and ethical recreational pastime.**



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Our hut and track heritage

WRITTEN BY ~ ROB BROWN | BACKCOUNTRY TRUST

The Backcountry Trust's role in its preservation



There are many things to be thankful for living in a country like New Zealand and probably at the top of most people's list is easy access to our coastlines, forests and mountains

For many people, every weekend we can get into the great outdoors and a growing number of people are doing just that for mental and physical health. The popularity of this shows no signs of slowing down and in recent years it's been evident that we've seen the growth of recreational pastimes like hunting almost exactly mirror the decline in participation of some of the traditional weekend team sports. Times are changing.



A local group who restored old Manson Hut in the Kawekas

In our remote country, access to those wild places has been made easier for many by an extensive hut, track and bridge network whose scale and diversity astounds many visitors to New Zealand, and is sometimes taken for granted by many residents who call New Zealand home.

The huts provide welcome shelter when the weather is foul, the bridges have greatly reduced the number of unnecessary drownings in swollen rivers and the tracks have been familiar pathways into the wilderness for many years.

Maintenance on this network is a big bundle of work and for nearly ten years now a quiet revolution has been happening in the way we look after the hut and track network. That revolution has been driven by the pretty simple idea that rather than just complaining that it is someone else's job to look after these places, that outdoors people can roll up their sleeves and help get the job done themselves. **Action has replaced entitlement.** Complaining has been replaced by collective community spirit.

In 2014 a pilot program to utilise volunteer input towards this work was formed between the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association (NZDA), Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) and Trail Fund NZ.

Funded through DOC's Community Conservation Partnership Fund (CCPF), what perhaps surprised everyone during those first three years was the quality of skills that came out of the woodwork to want to 'put something back in' to places in the backcountry they had a strong attachment to.

The success of the Outdoor Recreation Consortium led to the formation of the Backcountry Trust (BCT) in 2017 and since then the amount of work being done by the wider outdoors community has continued to grow. In the last six years the BCT has worked hard to make sure that the necessary level of structure and organisation sits in the background to enable that grass roots contribution without overwhelming the very thing that made it a success in the first place.

The role the Backcountry Trust (BCT) plays in helping enable this work to happen is varied and flexible. In some regions we have skilled and experienced groups capable of running their own projects who every year will have maintenance projects in their local area. With these groups, BCT mainly plays the role of

funder with minimal involvement in the project and there will already be an existing long-term relationship between a local DOC office and the group. **Some hunter led examples that come to mind are the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation who over 20 years have been incorporating a larger portfolio of huts and tracks into their existing conservation and game management activities.** The Sika Foundation is operating on a similar model in the Kaimanawas and numerous NZDA branches also have constructive relationships in their area to look after huts and tracks.

With some of these groups the work on huts and tracks is linked to broader conservation goals to include some pest control efforts on species like goats or trapping efforts to protect species like Whio. **What these models often show is that conservation and management issues are more likely to get solved at a local level through good communication that lead to collaborative working relationships.**

In other areas we have people wanting to get involved in doing the work who may lack the confidence or expertise to drive a project by themselves. In these places BCT contractors take on a more intensive project management role to drive monthly work programs through to a conclusion.

NZDA Malvern Branch
restoring Ranger Biv



Eel Creek A-frame on Lake Monowai in Southern Fiordland

The ways of getting the work done is as diverse as the wider community itself but what makes it successful is always having a razor-sharp focus on getting the work done in the field one way or another. The combination of these diverse ways of getting the work completed to a high standard provides some consistency to a summer work program and some months there will be multiple projects underway throughout the country.

What does the future hold for this model? Despite the obvious success of the BCT community in delivering maintenance on nearly one third of the hut network and thousands of kilometres of tracks in the last nine years, like many charitable trusts' the BCT's financial position continues to be fragile. To date we've always tried to retain the focus on delivery and from that good things will follow. That's true up to a certain extent, but it is no guarantee of long-term financial security.

Community goodwill and labour is one

thing, but it is the nature of the work that you cannot do much without a solid funding base. We have an oversupply of people wanting to get involved in the fieldwork and an under supply of money to fund each project. On one level, it's a nice problem to have.

Growing the funding base in the future is going to be critical for BCT and the maintenance of the hut and track network. BCT has for some time now realised that relying on central government funding is not going to offer long term security as government priorities will always be in a state of flux as they run head first into financial reality.

The financial squeeze on much of the network is not likely to change in the short or medium term. With increasing pressures on the public purse, and there are plenty of camp fire chats as to why those pressures are increasing, it is nevertheless a reality we have to live with that some things are going to require a modest level of external revenue.



Andy and Locky working on the
Freeman Burn Hut subfloor

As usual with a volunteer model, the efforts of a few realises benefits that are enjoyed by many. When it comes to funding the work there is still the problem of a lingering sense of entitlement along the lines of 'I pay my taxes therefore these places should be free' when there have been clear signals from multiple governments that these are not entitlements that are going to be fully funded.

BCT works hard to make sure that the efforts of volunteers aren't exploited or taken for granted, and as a principle we don't want them to be out of pocket when they are already giving their time and labour for free to benefit the wider community.

Long term, the community has to be part of the solution, with a combination of a monetary contribution and rolling up their sleeves to help get the work done. One thing most people are clear about is that the scale of the work, sitting as it does in one third of New Zealand's land mass, is beyond the scope of a small to medium sized government department.

The BCT is also working hard at raising revenue from external sources such as community trusts, bequests and sponsorship. So if you do enjoy staying in one of the 'free' huts for a week's hunting, consider donating to the BCT because 'free' in the world of government departments means there is no funding stream attached to them for their ongoing maintenance and survival.

Around 300 of the huts are free so if they are to survive for future generations the model has to work.



Rebuilding Lake Roe Hut roof (NZDA Upper Clutha)

We'll continue to ensure that 100 percent of these donations go straight back into the facility for future generations. These donations, separate of our funding agreement with DOC, are becoming increasingly critical in providing a pool of money that interested groups can apply for from BCT's overall budget.

Despite the current financial squeeze, positive things continue to happen in resolving deferred maintenance on the network and there is no apparent reason for doom and gloom about how to sustain it into the future. **Numbers and data on a computer screen are not always connected with on-the-ground reality.**

Just under half of the hut and track network was constructed by the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) between 1957 and the early 1970s, much of it to simple standard designs. Much of that network remains in good shape but there is a bit of mythology attached to that part of the network. The line that these now 50-year-old plus wooden and tin buildings are nearing the end of their useful life' will often be heard from people stressing that the work of conservation in New Zealand is all too much. Nothing could be further from the truth. **The 6-bunk S70 hut, and its smaller 4-bunk S81 have rightly become a New Zealand design classic and rightly celebrated for its durability.**

For those of us working on them its been a relatively straight forward building job to get them to a place where they can be easily maintained into the future on a modest budget.

The second bit of mythology that floats

about is that most of the NZFS hut network was constructed as shelter for government deer cullers. This is one of those half-truths over the years has gained more currency than it deserves.

While cullers were employed right through that period, commercial helicopter recovery was already underway by the early-1960s signalling the days of the government hunter were coming to an end. The NZFS were already ahead of that curve and when most of the hut network was installed in the first half of the 1960s, there was increasing emphasis what the future role recreational hunting would play in this mix. The recreation provision in the NZFS mandate was significant and went hand in hand with their management of Forest Parks. **Why else would so many 6-bunk huts be built for the smaller numbers of cullers on the government payroll?**

For the most part, it's this network of huts and tracks that will continue to hold high value for the hunting and tramping community and will continue to be one of the primary focus areas for the Backcountry Trust. As it was originally envisioned when it was built, it is there to cater to the diverse community of people recreating in these places and already we are seeing its increasing importance as the support network for on the ground biodiversity programmes.

We've had a brilliant collection of people that have stepped up in the past few years to preserve that heritage and they all deserve our support and collective appreciation.



Painting Old Top Forks Hut in Mt Aspiring National Park



Lawrence Biv restored by NZDA Ashburton

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TAKE THEM WHILE YOU CAN

WRITTEN BY - DONO GIBBS

Time stands still for no one. As a parent, I've been fortunate to be able to take my children out hunting on public land over the last few years

I was looking through old photos on the phone the other day and came some from trips completed with my young lad Callum - now a strapping teenager fast asleep upstairs (it's 1pm on a Saturday) and my daughter Danielle - about to move away to go to university in the New Year.

If anything, let this article encourage you to make the effort to take your children, or young ones in your life, out into the mountains or bush while you still can. They'll never forget it, and trust me, you will look back and be glad you've done it. So, hopefully, here are a few tips that might help you all to get the best out of the experience.

1. IT'S ALL ABOUT THEM

I acknowledge that hunting is my thing. But when I take them, it's all about them and their experience with Dad in the mountains or bush. My priority is to make their whole experience memorable so they will want to return. This means that

hunting actually isn't the priority, they are. Callum's first trip was at the age of ten. On a hot summer's afternoon, we climbed up Kaweka J from Makahu car park. We took our time climbing up, taking the opportunity to look for deer and to check out Dominie Hut along the way. If anything, reaching the tops a couple of hours later, I was amazed at how durable he was. But, we'd paced ourselves and had a few breaks to hydrate and talk to a young hunter who'd moved past us. Reaching the tops, having only one pair of brand new binos, Callum spent the majority of time glassing. I realised in a panic I'd left it too late to make the bush edge, so we tucked up in the tussock under our polycro tarp. He slept like a log while I kept a vigilant eye on the fog and wind at night, but we got through it.

2. PLANNING FOR THEM

You have to plan with them in mind. For all the trips that we undertook, I made sure that there were good weather windows or access to huts, should it all go pear-shaped.

CLOTHING

Make sure that they have the right clothing. It doesn't have to be the latest hunt-branded gear. We actually found a lot at Save Mart. I ensured they had a good hat, waterproof jacket (both for wind protection and rain), puffer jacket, fleece top with merino base layers, and socks. Make sure you pack a woolen beanie and gloves. Given their smaller body size, they will lose heat more quickly than adults. The only thing I had to seriously invest in for both was proper footwear. In Callum's case, his boots lasted a couple of years before he was wearing my Salomon's (he's got bigger feet than me already). Danielle used Mum's Salomons. One of the great delights was that when they grew out of gear off it went to very grateful parents with younger children.



Our first family "walk in" to Te Puia Hut. There are hot springs about 40 minutes walk from the hut



Danielle in the Kaimanawa tops. Lunchtime is a great time to get photos for social media



Callum having breakfast at 12pm. While he slept in, I got a cheeky stalk in!

FOOD

The kids just loved the treats they associated with a night out hunting with Dad. While I might pack with calories and weight in mind for my own solo trips, with the kids I'm thinking - what will make the time really memorable? For breakfast - pack something they regularly eat, and add a hot chocolate drink mix. Snacks - One Square Meal and muesli bars, sour lollies and chocolate during the day. For dinner, they really look forward to freeze-dried meals, and the smoothie mixes are also a real hit. It's amazing what a hot cup of chocolate or berry tea will taste like together at night. Sitting down and preparing a meal with each other is a real highlight and something they look forward to.

PACK

I wanted to make sure that each child had the opportunity to carry a pack, but generally, I kept the weight to no more than three to four kilograms, in a 20-30 litre pack at the most, that fits comfortably. General items are in their bags - a sleeping pad, quilt, puffer jacket, gloves, beanie and other light, compressible

items, with Dad is carrying the heavier items. I made the mistake on one trip of over-packing a "normal" pack for Callum before he'd hit his straps. This made for a really unenjoyable hike for him. Now that he is 15, he takes great pride in carrying gear for Mum and his sister, and has the strength and frame to do so. That means a larger pack for me, so out come the trekking poles!

normal night back home in the city. On another trip, I packed the Hilleberg soulo without the inner. We slept in the bush under the outer, with a ground sheet. This meant my son, then an early teen, could sleep in undisturbed till lunch time while I hunted the surrounding bush. That's a win-win.

SHELTER

This was a real surprise to me. Kids are really resilient. Most of our trips have been in summer, so I've typically packed a light polycro tarp and blue warehouse tarp ground sheet. This has been really ideal. It's meant that we've been able to sleep under the stars, normally tucked up under a bush belt for shelter. This enables them to connect with the environment and see the stars they wouldn't see on a

SLEEP SYSTEMS

Again, smaller bodies lose heat far quicker than we do as adults. With that in mind, I've always ensured that the kids (and my wife for that matter) always have an appropriately rated sleeping pad - even when sleeping on mattresses in public huts. The other part of the equation is the sleeping bag. In our case, we use quilts, which are suitably rated. Ensure they have a beanie and a hot drink before getting to bed early enough. They are going to need sleep, particularly



The three hour walk in to Te Puia Hut in the Kawekas

after a big walk-in. This might look like all morning the next day. Be mindful of this around tramping distances and departure times. Keep it realistic.

HUTS

We are truly blessed to be able to stay in a range of public huts around the country. This is an amazing opportunity to introduce the kids to the back country, and to teach them etiquette around living with others in these areas. We'd talk about keeping the hut tidy, being mindful of others by being quiet later at night and being respectful. A life principle is looking after other people's things and leaving them in a better state than when you received them. We would always tidy up before we left and let others know where we were going. Another tip is to make sure you bring fire starters, something I regretted overlooking on a cold winter's trip into the Pureoras. The wood at the hut was soaked, which made for a very cold evening.

One year, Callum and I based ourselves at Middle Hut for the Sika roar. We met a few hunters that we have since kept in touch with. One hunter, Dan and his dog Sophie (published in NZ Hunter), even helped us to try to locate a stag I'd shot on a walk back to the hut the previous day. Dan graciously took us out on our last night walkout to see if we could roar in a Sika stag, which we nearly managed in the fading light. On the walkout in the dark, Callum was amazed to hear the chorus of stags roaring just before the car park. He had eyes as wide as saucers.



Our makeshift camp at the top of Kaweka J. It held fast in the wind and fog



Our first roar trip together. We stayed at Middle Hill Hut. Callum's eyes were like saucers when he heard his first Sika hee haw

3. PRIORITIZE THEIR EXPERIENCE

PATIENCE

Again, the number one priority is to make the trip an enjoyable experience for them. While glassing the Kaimanawa tops one evening, I managed to locate a young stag bedded within a few minutes. My daughter was mucking around in the bush ridge above me. The thought crossed my mind "I bet she's gonna come running..." at that moment she ran down the slope and in a loud voice proceeded to tell me something of importance - which escapes me now. I quickly glassed back toward the stag a couple of hundred metres away, who whirled around and disappeared. "What was it that you wanted to show me Love?" is what I hope I said after that. It's all about them.

TAKE TIME OUT TO EXPLORE

As my son hit his early teens, he really started to need deep sleep-ins. Many fathers, myself included, might

view this as laziness until our parents or siblings remind us that is exactly what we were like. On the roar trip to Middle Hut in the Kawekas, Callum would join me for the morning bush hunts, but tuck up in his sleeping bag all afternoon and listen to music on his device. While frustrating - this was what he needed. On another trip to the Kaimanawa tops, Danielle would sleep in all morning, so I'd be able to sneak off for a quick glass and attend to camp chores - like locating water. During the heat of the summer afternoon, when no doubt the deer were bedded, we'd take the opportunity to explore and take photos (no doubt for her social media at a later stage).

GENERAL FITNESS AND HYDRATION

Make sure that the trips you plan are doable in terms of your children's fitness levels. With tops trips in mind, my daughter and I would often train together the month beforehand. This is a fabulous way to bond and hang out together. Make sure that they have comfortable footwear and clothing. A big tip, particularly at the start of a big climb, is to ensure they wear lighter clothing



Bivy camping under the stars in the Kaimanawas. Dehy meals are compulsory I'm told



My good mate Matt Kingy Crockett providing shooting pointers for Callum at his farm. It takes a village to raise our young men

so they don't overheat. Also, ensure that you stop for breaks regularly and hydrate. I always make sure I have extra hydration packs on hand for tops trips with this in mind. The investment in base fitness really pays off.

PRACTICE WITH A RIFLE

Taking time before a trip to give the children an opportunity to practice shooting a rifle builds into the experience. For my son, that was shooting a .22 on a friend's farm, just to get his eye in, and to feel the responsibility of using a firearm. Learning the Firearms Code, and more importantly, why we need to think about how we

are using and storing our firearms, helps our children to understand responsibility beyond self.

4. MAKE TRIPS WORK AROUND THEIR SCHEDULE

As the teens have gotten older, the opportunity to get out hunting together has become less. My daughter still wants to do the odd trip, but we are often limited to a post-Christmas tops trip. She loves it, but the clear expectation is that we will do only one night and the right freeze-dried meals are packed. At this age, their friends

are everything, so take the opportunity to plan to get away together and make time.

We will never regret the times that we invested in special getaway trips with children. In a flash, they will be leaving home, off to see the world, and all we are left with are those memories and the time we have taken to build the relationship with them before they left. Taking them out into the wild, open places will teach them resilience, endurance, patience, and adaptability. It also teaches them the need to be responsible for the way we treat our Public Land, and respect the birds and animals upon it. **So, take the opportunity to pull up the diary and Metservice, and lock a trip in. You won't regret it.**





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A Bike, A Bullet and a Big-Ol'-Boy

WRITTEN BY - PATT BARRETT

I often find that a little bit of inventiveness is the key to success in many things in life, and hunting is no different

So, when I purchased an e-bike, I did so with the mindset that I really hoped to use it for hunting as well as just a fun ride to explore familiar and not-so-familiar locales. This set me to thinking that I needed a robust machine that could negotiate a few tracks and trails, carry a reasonable load in and out, and be transportable in my ute. Behold the Scout! It's a great little machine

that does all of the above and more, as it's foldable so you can load it into the ute well-deck (bit of a lift required as it weighs around 30kg) but also get it around gates designed to keep trail bikes out. I gave it a bit of a workout around my home town of Christchurch and took it on a trip into the Ashburton Lakes over the past summer but really wanted to christen it on a full-fledged



Great country to access with the bike

hunting mission. Post-roar provided the opportunity.

I had a specific destination in mind that wouldn't require me to carry a lot of food and gear. I hoped to get good results from this trip as I knew there were animals in the area, including stags. However, my primary goal was to gather meat.

Come predawn one week-day morning I was up and away for the spectacle of sunrise, somewhere a bit remote but which could give me a good ride in. Setting up the bike for the ride takes a few minutes, especially in the dark, trying to juggle a helmet, headlamp, backpack and rifle. Having fitted a small wire basket to the carrier on the back made a huge difference as I could just dump my backpack into it, along with a few other small items and not have to worry about extra load on my back swinging about.

Cruising off along the trail was a joy to behold, so effortless and quiet, and glad that I had both the bike light and my headlamp to illuminate tight corners as I turned into them at a steady pace. **It was cold but not numbingly so, and the biking soon warmed me up so I could settle into the ride and keep the pace up to arrive in good time,** well before dawn, at my allotted hunting spot. The ride was about an hour and I was soon clambering off the Scout, grabbing my kit and heading for the hunt location.

I was in time, at least I hoped so, as it was just starting to get a little light in the eastern sky, though the valley was still very dark. Nestling down in the vegetation, I found a good spot overlooking a creek head and waited for more light.

Slowly, the deeper shadows began to dissipate, and I could get my first real look at the valley head with the binoculars. Low and behold! **There were deer about. This was looking good!** It was still too dark to shoot though, and I was beginning to get concerned that they would up and scamper before there was enough light.

There appeared to be two near a small bluff feeding on sub-alpine scrub so I began to line them up. As I did so, I got a better look at the top of the bluff they were feeding under and realised that another animal was bedded down up there as well.

With the light now growing stronger it was not long before I identified antlers! Whoo hoo – jackpot! Just then, he stood up, presenting a nice broadside shot, which I had ranged at 220m. He shook himself and looked ready to leave.

Chambering a 110gn TTSX in my 270 I steadied the rifle on a rock outcrop and carefully squeezed it off. The supersonic boom echoed around the valley, scaring the life out of anything living out there, and as the sight picture returned to my eye, I caught a very brief glimpse



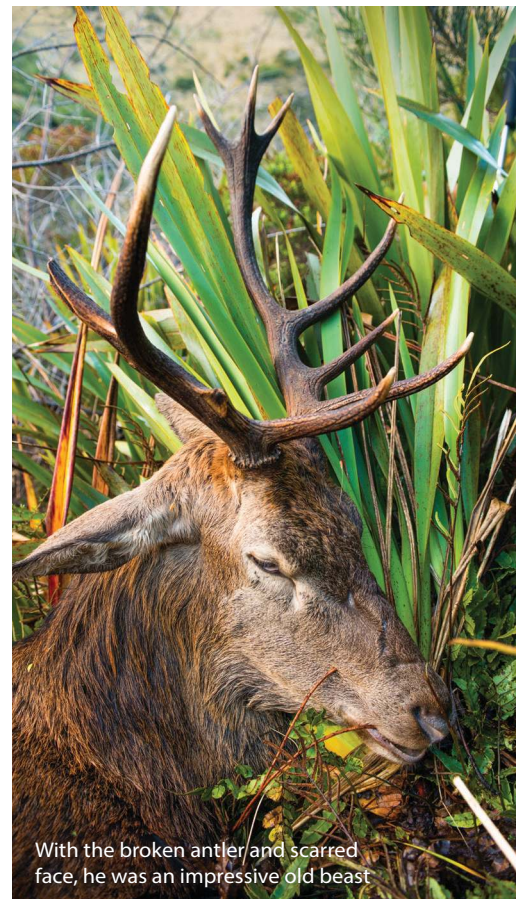
A good sign, deer prints on the track



The ol' boy where he fell



The Scout loaded up for the trip out



With the broken antler and scarred face, he was an impressive old beast

of the stag crashing sideways off the bluff. There were a few more crashes to follow and then complete and utter silence as the daylight grew.

I waited, and as there was nothing moving I quickly began to scan the all sides of the bluff hoping to pick something up, but nothing.

I moved position, got steadier, and began scanning in earnest, keeping the rifle handy with a round to go should he make a run for it. Nothing. I looked up where he had been, then to where the other deer had been, and then into the stream below. Still nothing. I calmed myself and took another long look at the base of the bluff which appeared to have some thick scrub

bands extending along and into the nearby watercourse, and then I saw it – just the tips of the antlers and a bit of the head. Bringing the rifle up, I locked onto the head with the scope and watched intently for several minutes, unwilling to send another shot in and possibly wreck the head, but ready to do so should he move. There was no movement, not a stir.

Hastily packing up my gear, I checked again, just to be sure, and headed on up there, making short work of the 300-400 metre trip to the stream and bluff, and then a brief fight with the scrub to finally arrive, out of breath, at the site. A last heave-ho over a fallen tree and there he was – a

big-bodied ole boy who had been in a fair few scrapes with one broken antler, but still running up to 8 points. The antlers had good form with a nice crown on the top of the unbroken one, making for a little disappointment that one was broken in half. **Yet, it had been a great hunt and I was really pleased to have secured a stag.**

Now for the recovery. Moving him was out of the question so I had to set to and do the job right there and then. First, off with his head, then the backsteaks in quick order, followed up by the hindquarters, whole, and then the off-side shoulder that the shot hadn't damaged. This all entailed a fairly large pack of meat and cuts, with which I then duly hiked back to the bike. However, I knew it would be too much for one trip, both for me and the Scout, so I eventually managed to get it all back to the bike and then made two trips out to my ute. By the time I was all packed up and out at the ute with the bike stowed again inside it was almost 3pm and I was done humping meat and antlers, and looking for a good meal and rest-up. It had been quite the day and a test for man and machine, with top marks going to the Scout. **The man would recover in a day or so.**






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TO FILL THE FREEZER THE CUP OR A BIT OF BOTH?

WRITTEN BY ~ MICHAEL MCCORMACK
@CHASEANDGATHER

When people think of hunters, most of them would say we do it to "fill the freezer" or to "provide for the family" - and they would be right, as that is the most common reason hunters get out there on the chase

But, underlying that primary reason, there is such diversity as to why hunters seek the hills under the coverage of "going 'hunting.'" There is more than meets the eye than just filling the freezer. Any hunter will know that a hunting trip intended to gather some meat can often turn into an "armed tramp" with nothing gathered to bring home. So, if we aren't successful in obtaining some game meat, what else might we gain out of the whole experience and time away in the outdoors?

Historically, I feel that as hunters,

we haven't been very good at articulating all of the 'extra' benefits that we experience, feel or get from our adventures in the outdoors. One trend in the hunting community is the growing emphasis on mental health and wellness in outdoor activities.

MAKING THE CHANGE

I recently had a stressful five or six months. There was a significant increase in workload, responsibilities and managing staff, plus the regular day to day tasks escalating kids schooling activities, sports practices/games, family members going through health challenges, and the list went on. I could feel the pressure building, so I tried to 'work smarter, not harder', which worked for a while, but then the blinkers came on, and I struggled to

zoom out. My regular routines of daily exercise and intentional time with the kids, wife and dog became sporadic, and I became too focused on my work performance, as well as trying to juggle all the balls in the air - it was running me into the ground physically and mentally. I needed a circuit breaker to get me out of the rut and back into healthier habits.

To make a change, I realised that I needed to create the change myself, and some of that change was inspired by my time outdoors in the elements - being able to think more clearly and without distractions. Following on and with a clear vision in mind, I developed the mindset and courage to negotiate more realistic working arrangements, which led to better sleep and lower stress levels. This was a great start. Secondly, I resumed a low-key exercise

regime with a focus on the frequency of exercise rather than the intensity of effort. I also ensured that at least 75% of my exercise sessions were outdoors.

After that, and with fortunate timing, a combination of factors aligned - my wife had the foresight to arrange a family get-away for us all (which included a lot of time outdoors, spearfishing, exercise and sunshine), and a mate Callum, invited me on a hunting trip to chase some Rusa the weekend after. At the time of the invitation, my initial thought was, "I don't really have time to go" but I said yes, and just committed to it because I really needed a break away.

FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

I recently put up a question on the Chase and Gather Facebook page, asking people about the reasons they hunt (these listed below don't include the "freezer filler" reasons). Here are a few of the quoted responses:

"What the bush does for a person's wairua is priceless. Like many others, I like to get away to reset, zero the mind. The factor that the outdoors has on the mindset and wellbeing, having that connection, I struggle to measure "

"Mental health, de-stress, inner frequency realignment. Or whatever you want to call it. To be in the backcountry, whether that be sharing a few laughs around a crackling fire at the end of a day"

"Adventures creating memories"

"The main reason for going away on



Time outdoors in the elements means being able to think more clearly and without distractions

a "hunting trip" would be to get away from the stresses of everyday life. Mental cleanse for lack of a better word"

"To exercise my brain in a healthy place, then same for my body"

"I just love hunting & everything about it - the highs & the lows, the exercise."

"The second point is pushing myself past that fatigue point and stressing the mind. Nothing better [than] knowing you have had a successful hunt and bought the most out for the family and friends. Even though the body hurts the mind feels good"

"Quality time in paradise to cleanse the mind and share memories with lifelong mates."

"The bush with its peace and quiet and unpredictable elements. Being with other men, or my boys, gathering meat, sitting around the fire, a beer and a story. Unbeatable"

"With the hound and enjoying the freedom and beauty of our country even if nothing is taken"

"Taha Wairua - Spiritual well-being"

"To get away from everything and unwind in the peace of the outdoors, and to

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Time outdoors in the elements means being able to think more clearly and without distractions



spend time with friends sit around talking in a hut or campsite no phone service just having good old conversations and making memories to last a lifetime!"

"Reset in nature" "Peace solitude nature"

"Being able to share the experience of our great country with friends and whanau that you don't get by sitting at home. Teaching my children life skills"

To me, all of these reasons resonate in terms of either being an element of mental well-being or the entirety of it. Hearing such diversity and detailed enthusiasm in the responses made me realise that so often, we just make a passing comment to people that we are off to "fill the freezer." If we communicated these detailed reasons instead (as above) with our mates, colleagues, family and friends, then I am sure that more people would understand our passion and see the significant health benefits that we all experience in our time in the outdoors. The benefits almost seem limitless and available to most people! Places like the NZDA are incredible places to get a foothold in learning some aspects of the hunting, but they also foster opportunities for social engagement and fellowship. Some of my

best mates are the ones with whom I go hunting, fishing, or diving - and I am sure you are the same. The bonds you create with one another by going through together build your trust and friendships.

CHECKING OUT

The weekend away chasing Rusa was one of the soggiest trips I have ever been on, but it was one of the most worthwhile in terms of benefits for my mental health. The time away in the hills with good mates allowed me the opportunity to slow down and re-calibrate. I recall many moments on the trip sitting quietly with a calm and relaxed mind, being very mindful and observant of the wood pigeon, the morepork, and Urewera mist creeping over the ridge into the valley. I sat there with my bino's just enjoying the peace of mind, knowing that I didn't have to be anywhere at a certain time, or there wasn't the pressure to do anything. I could just sit there.

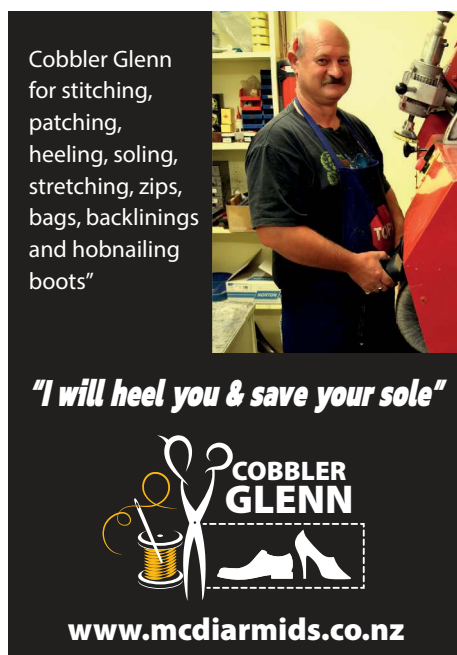
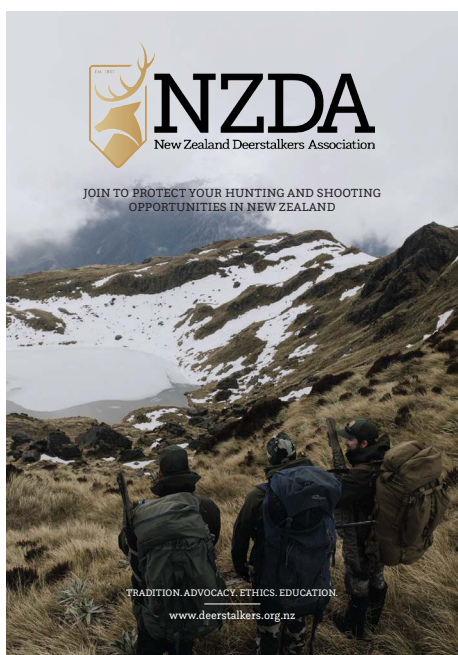
FELLOWSHIP

Another part of the hunting trip that I want to mention briefly is the social element of mental health and the importance of fellowship, connection or "spending time with mates." Personally, I really enjoy

solitude and seek it often to help me with processing the dynamics of life and lifestyle. You should create time and space for it regularly, but there is also a massive benefit in bonding with others - time to connect, share stories, challenges, highlights, and troubleshoot things while you are out there on your adventures. Fishing and other outdoor pursuits are also excellent examples, and they can be another exceptional opportunity for this type of "catch up" where mates and families come together to spend some quality time (and good food) with one another!

At the end of each day's hunting, we spent time around the fire sharing hunting stories, what people were getting up to in their day to day life and having some mighty good yarns from one storyteller in particular.

This hearty banter was a great reminder that we all need a good laugh and a few decent storytelling sessions regularly. It was also another good reminder that all of us walk through challenging seasons in life, sometimes it's up, and sometimes it's down, but getting through it well depends on how we respond to those moments. Having someone to share it with helps a lot! Although we saw a handful of deer on the trip, which we selectively left, the social element of





You should create time and space for alone time regularly, but there is also a massive benefit in bonding with others

connecting was a real highlight of the trip and we all left with some big smiles!

CHECKING IN

I find it a lot easier and more comfortable to ask mates how they are tracking in life, or how they are feeling when we are in the outdoors doing something rather than in a "let's sit down and discuss things" type of format. Both have their time and place, but for me the conversations in the open spaces seem to flow well and allow folk to share openly. Sometimes it can take a slight distraction to enable the conversations to flow better.

A simple prompt I use when checking in with someone is to ask them (as example): Me: "hey bro, how are things going?"

Them: "pretty well - busy though" Me: "oh yep, on a scale of 1 to 10?"

From their response, anything above an 8/10 is pretty good going. If it is 7 or below, I will just casually say, "oh yep - what would get you up to an 8 out of 10?"

From there, they will often mention a current issue or challenge that you can let them elaborate on, listen to, and offer encouragement. Make sure you follow up on that the next time you see them. But in that scenario, let them know that you are genuinely interested in their response.

TIPS FOR THE TRIPS

Without sounding like a mother - If you are planning a mission and feeling mentally and physically burned out, don't go and absolutely destroy yourself on a mammoth mission. It is best to buddy up when you can. Avoid missions that call for a lot of technical and physically demanding detail. Dial back the expectations, and instead hunt easier terrain, or scale back on what you might normally tackle when

you are at 100%.

We all know that hunting trips can be some of the most physically demanding moments of our lives that can push us to our limits physically and mentally.

Other simple tips would be to ensure that you get good quality sleep if you can (yes, some people snore very loudly so take earplugs) or invest in a good sleeping bag and ground mat. The idea is to return from the hills "restored" rather than ruined, especially if your tank is already empty.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Ensure that you plan to allow enough time at the end of a hunt/ next day to process all of your washing, butchery, clean up - take your time doing these things before you head straight back into the day-to-day hustle from which you just escaped.

SUM IT UP

I know that many of you will feel the same, or describe it differently, but there is something about the "fresh air" of the hills and the pursuit of adventure that supports us all to feel better and to become better people.

So remember, when you tell people about the reasons you hunt, be sure to include some of the deeper reasons - for your mental health and that if you get to go more often, you will likely bring back more meat, and bring back a better person at the same time!

I will leave you with this pretty decent quote from Henry David Thoreau - "I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees." I am sure all of us can relate to that in some way.

Catch you out there,
Michael



Owner - Allan Foot

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The Perks of Making Mistakes

WRITTEN BY
MITCH THORN
@SOUTHISLANDRIFLEWALKERS

We've all had a few disasters behind the trigger, and if you haven't... it'll come. Recently, I've had a couple of heartbreakers with animals I've spent years searching for

It was a couple of basic mistakes that have left me scratching my head and wondering how I could be so stupid! Anyone who has ever searched for a trophy animal knows the feeling of investing significant time and money into the hunt. Sometimes, when you finally achieve something, it can be exhilarating. However, I must admit that I have allowed this feeling to take over me a few times in the past.

I've made two trips down to the outdoorsman's paradise of Stewart Island. I absolutely love this place for its amazing diving and hunting experiences and just can't seem to get enough of it. The Whitetail deer down there have earned a reputation as the 'grey ghost'. They're sneaky little critters that know how to stay hidden in the thick native bush. I'm not very skilled at hunting in the bush, as most of my trips involve spotting and stalking, and tops hunting knowledge doesn't translate into bush hunting all that well. There's a few basics that carry through but, for most part, it's a whole different ball game.

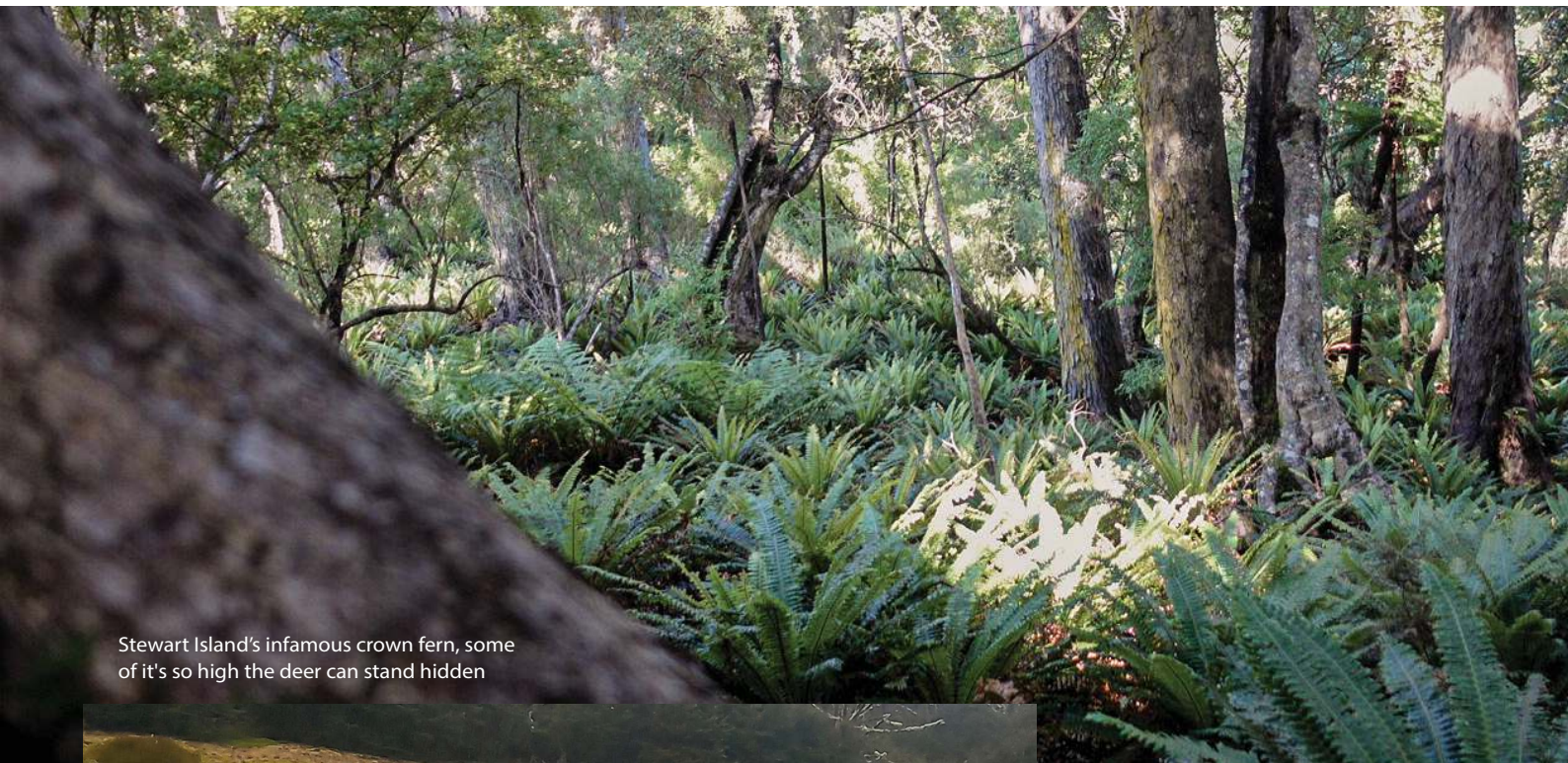
SHOOTING

On my first trip to the Island, I spooked two deer in the bush (that I saw). It's incredible how quietly a Whitetail can move through bush without making a noise; meanwhile, I'm snapping, cracking, brushing and cursing my way through the crown fern. On my second trip I spooked a deer on just my second day of hunting. It was pretty quiet after that until I decided to hunt the coastline, a more familiar style of hunting. Stalking around points to glass across the beaches in the next bay, I could finally see further than my sound would travel. After a total of 16 days of hunting in Stewart Island, I finally spotted a Whitetail doe peacefully grazing at the edge of the forest without any knowledge of my presence. I took my time getting set up by moving between different rocks to make sure I had a solid rest. Once settled in behind the scope, all I had to do was wait for the deer and produce

a shot. It was feeding towards me, but I wanted a broadside opportunity. Whitetail are the smallest deer species in New Zealand, and it looked tiny through the scope. 'It must be a yearling' I told myself. It started backing up into the bush, so I squeezed off a shot at the first opportunity. Missed, and I had no idea where it went. I walked over to where it had been in the hopes of a blood trail that I knew wouldn't be there, and realised what had gone wrong. The deer was tiny in the scope because it was bloody ages away! I thought it couldn't have been further than 200 yards, but after pacing it out, the distance was easily 400 yards. I'd left my rangefinder in the hut.

I've got no excuse for my most recent miss of a 10-inch chamois, something I've been pursuing for years. It's the only chamois I've looked at and known it was a shooter immediately. There was no doubt in our minds the tape would run over 10 inches. At 200m I was within range and getting settled behind the trigger. I was shooting at a horrible angle uphill, so the barrel

A bluebird North Canterbury day. The temperature didn't take long to push into the 30's



Stewart Island's infamous crown fern, some of it's so high the deer can stand hidden



A screengrab of the moment Chris warned me about resting the barrel on the bench. A tough one to look back on



A screengrab from a video of the chamois I missed. We weren't sure it was a buck due to it's narrow horns with smaller hooks but we were sure it would crack the 10 inch mark

of my rifle rested on a piece of wood. My mate Chris warned against it. In the moment's excitement and out of fear the chamois would spook at any second I disregarded his advice and let off a shot. The bullet hit the dirt about a foot above the chamois' head... bloody idiot! I'd ignored one of the basics of rifle shooting, to rest on the stock rather than the barrel. Placing the barrel against anything catastrophically affects the barrels harmonics, causing the bullet to land in a different spot to where it is zeroed.

ACCESS

When I was new to public land hunting, I decided to take old university mate Lewis out into the hills. This trip was one of the first that I had planned on my own. Prior to this, I had always followed my friends who were experienced hunters and knew more about planning such trips. It was Lewis's first hunting trip, so I was hoping to get him onto a deer. We set off on a warm summer evening to a spot I had eyed on the North Canterbury topo

maps. It looked like there was a 4WD track cutting halfway up the hill before a bush bash to the tops. In a similar theme to my first story - we left after work and arrived around 6pm. Halfway down a long gravel road we were staring across a farmer's paddock, it didn't look as it should. No DOC signs or track markers, just a farm track setting off into the hills.

The local DOC office was closed, and I couldn't get hold of a ranger to check if we were in the right place.

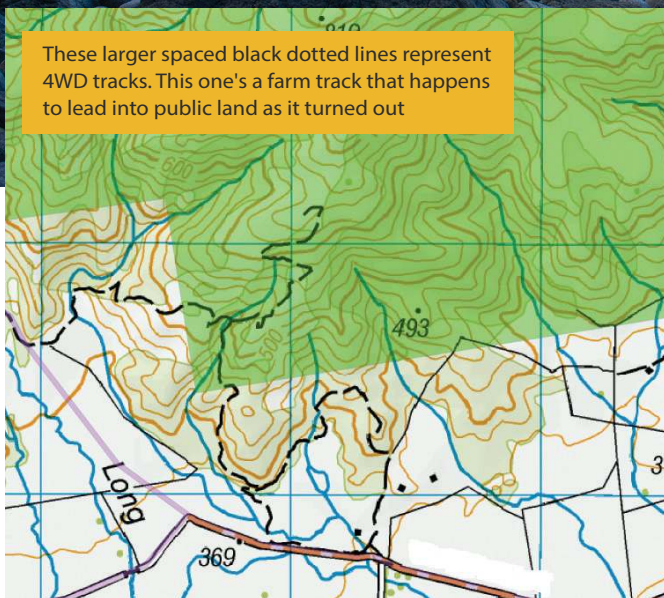
I couldn't see any farmhouses nearby, and after checking the topo map more closely discovered that there was a strip of private land in front of the public land. I decided to leave a note on the dashboard with my trip intentions, name and number in case we were doing wrong (as it turns out, we definitely were).

We set off up the track with still no track markers to be seen. The bush bash turned out to be the thickest mānuka regrowth I have ever seen, through a wall of two to four metre high trees with overlapping branches filling in every gap between. We had hoped to reach the tops that evening, but after a couple of hours of extremely slow progress, pushed our way into a clearing just big enough for the tent. We were back into it the next morning, scratching our way through the mānuka, constantly checking the topo map, hoping we were on the right course for the tops. **It was a massive relief when we eventually broke out to the open country.** We emerged completely covered in cuts and scratches; I don't know how you pig hunters do it every trip.

The mānuka regrowth was replaced by



Coastal Stewart Island. The deer I missed was around the next point



These larger spaced black dotted lines represent 4WD tracks. This one's a farm track that happens to lead into public land as it turned out

hours to bash up the mānuka. That meant if we wanted to get back in time, we'd have to turn around for another five hours of torture. We were absolutely broken - what a disaster. I tried to call the farmer but got no answer. Instead, I sent a text apologising for the

was a DOC access track. I had my tail tucked between my legs and apologised for the misunderstanding. He changed his tune and told us to carry on hunting, I guess he could see the honesty in the situation with the note that I'd left. After a fifteen-minute chat, he ended up saying if we ever wanted to head back up into the area, I could give him a call, and he'd give us access, but asking beforehand was essential.

beech-covered valleys on either side of the open ridgeline carving a path to the peaks above. **That relief quickly disappeared when I checked for service on my phone.** There was a text from an angry farmer that said if we weren't back at our car by 5pm it would be towed (to put it nicely). It was noon and it had taken us a total of five

situation and that we'd be on our way back to the car asap. We sat down for some lunch to prepare ourselves for the afternoon, both of us needing a minute.

The farmer called back and ended up being a bloody good bugger. I explained that we were out the back on the public land and that I'd thought his farm track

WATER

As with any poorly planned trip the issues didn't stop there. We had about a litre of water left between us, which would only cover our dehydrated meals for dinner so set up camp and dropped into the forest to find a stream. It was about 2pm and the temperature was pushing up into the 30s. I left Lewis relaxing under the canopy while I set off



We had a standoff for a few minutes, the chamois would stomp its hoof and let out a big huff



The manuka bush bash route, our destination was the bush line out the back. This North Canterbury country can be very dry, be sure to consider water availability in your plans

downhill following a dry streambed. I would've lost about 300m of altitude and the stream was still bone dry. All I could think about on the climb back was that we would have to abandon the trip return to the car. We hadn't even picked up the binos - what a shambles of a hunt.

There was one section of the stream bed that was a bit greener than the rest, with clumps of grass growing up from the otherwise barren dirt.

I moved a pile of rocks out of the way and opened up a small cavern, about the length of my arm and the width of a football. Right at the back of the cavern was a slow drip, about once every two seconds. I couldn't believe my eyes! I grabbed the drink bottle and carefully wedged it under the drip. It wasn't much, but it was something. After a couple hours of snoozing, we returned to collect a litre of water in the bottle. We spent the rest of the trip rotating a bottle out from under the drip.

Now that we had a system for collecting water, we could finally start thinking about hunting, which turned out to be pretty lacklustre. A lone deer was spotted in the distance, but it was way too far off to consider stalking. The main highlight was a chamois family group that fed their way across the ridge about 60 metres in front of us. I asked Lewis if he wanted to shoot his first chamois, but our aim was to get venison for the freezer, so he was happy enough to watch them

carry on with their evening. The next morning, we got back to the car after a trip that I hope to never experience again. However, it was filled with valuable lessons and memories that I will always remember. During our trip, there was a high probability that we could have been trespassed, but fortunately, we were lucky enough to have phone service and even luckier that the farmer was in a good mood. It would have been a bloody long walk back to Hanmer to pick up the car. Research your access and ask permission from the correct people before crossing any private land. If you call the local DOC office during opening hours, you should be able to track down the right person to ask. If that fails, door knocking is going to be your next best bet. **I'd recommend having a box of beers in your vehicle when you do it.** Not all black dotted lines on the topo map are DOC tracks! If there are no DOC signs or orange markers at the start of it, you're likely looking at a farm track or an old 4WD track. In hindsight, this is all pretty obvious, but when starting out with no experience, the basics can trip you up.

The final lesson learned from the journey is the importance of having access to water. Ever since that trip, I've made it a habit to bring 4.5 litres of water with me whenever I go on a hike to a dry area during the summer. Running out of water is a scary feeling, and being dehydrated makes life extremely difficult. Not all streams you see on the topo map will be

flowing all year round. North Canterbury in late summer is renowned for being a dry place. **Climbing hills in 30°C isn't easy yakka, and we underestimated how much water we would need.**

It's very helpful to have the ability to hold a large amount of water if you come across only a few drinkable water sources during a trip. A water filter is also a handy piece of kit. You can catch a few nasty bugs from drinking dirty water in the hills (some tarns look suspiciously like ex-wallows). Giardia leaves you with a stomach bug that can last weeks. A water filter can make it possible for you to safely drink from almost any water source, without the risk of getting sick.

Making mistakes is a positive sign that you are challenging yourself and developing new abilities. No one starts out as an expert in anything, especially backcountry hunting. There are so many lessons to learn and small details to pick up, gear to forget and animals to spook. These articles have by no means explored all of the mistakes I've made since I started hunting and I'm sure these won't be my last. They've definitely slowed down over the years and I've had lessons I hope I'll never have to learn again. **One thing I can assure you is that I'll be watching the back end of an animal I'm hunting disappearing over the horizon sometime soon.**





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10
ROUNDS



10
ROUNDS

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10
ROUNDS



5
ROUNDS

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SMALL BOARS BIG IVORIES

WRITTEN BY
JONATHAN FULTON

Like it or loathe it, pig-hunting competitions are part of the very DNA of many of this country's small rural communities

At their best, they allow folks who otherwise live in extreme isolation to come together and celebrate all that is good about our unique way of life. Farmers, fencers, tradies, mechanics and full-time pig hunters are just a few of the characters who meet once or twice a year – usually in a car park – stand next to the boars hanging on display to talk dogs, hunting and life. I see people at these weigh-ins who seem to vanish for the remaining 362 days of the year – they drag all the critters out of the woodwork!

For a small portion of pig hunters rule number one is to 'avoid all hunting competitions', but I couldn't disagree with this more. I am as guilty as the next person of letting a competitive

streak overrun common sense and consequently making a dick of myself, but with the right attitude, 'comps' can be a lot of fun. When we enter, our mantra has always been 'stick to the rules and go hard, give it everything, have a good time', and afterwards celebrate the highs and lows with other like-minded souls.

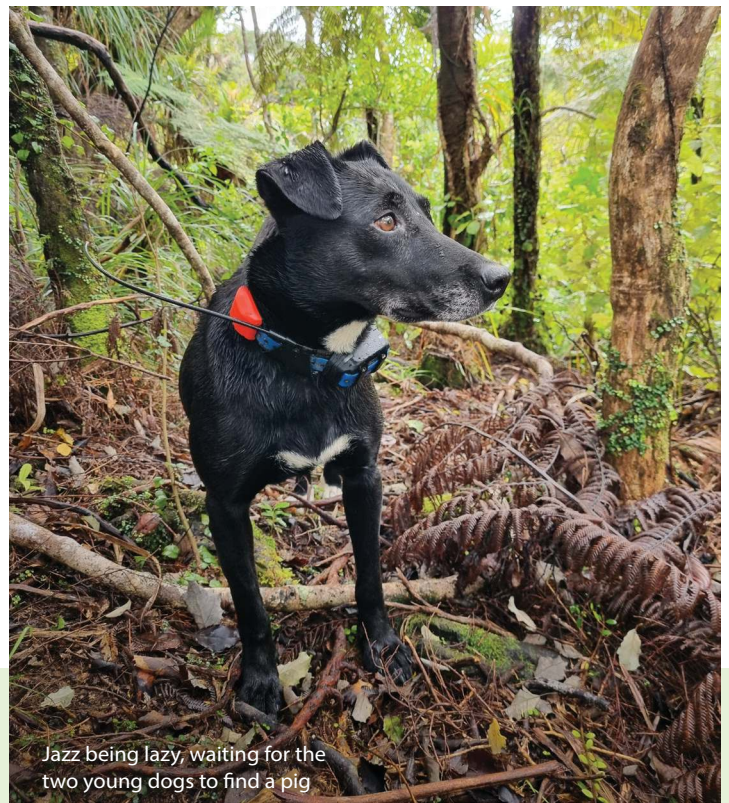
Of course, ogling over those once-in-a-lifetime pigs that very infrequently meet their end in a competition weekend is a huge attraction – usually a battle-bruised old warrior of a boar, the scars of life deeply etched on its shield and flanks, wrinkled snout and deep-set eyes telling of a hard life, grinders curving round in an incomplete circle like Cape Buffalo

horns, and most importantly the tusks. To this hunter, a beautiful set of tusks is on a par with a trophy bull tahr, chamois or Red stag head. Living in a hard-hunted area where genuinely big pigs are a thing of the past, catching a boar with big tusks in a competition has long been a challenge.

The winter of 2023 was similar to many others in the far north – grey, overcast, and extremely wet – meaning our fragile, heavy clay soils were waterlogged and slippery. Low sunshine hours equated to poor grass growth, and with food reserves in native forests in short supply, wild pigs were roaming far and wide in search of food. Perfect for hunters! My hunting companion Zacque Price and myself had enjoyed our share of successful hunts, when it seemed all the time, energy, and perseverance with the two young dogs had finally come to fruition.



Zacque Price
hoping for a bark



Jazz being lazy, waiting for the
two young dogs to find a pig

At times they had both begun to out-find, out-hunt and out-stop their older sister and the mainstay in the kennels for many years, Jazz. When August rolled around, Zacque and my daughter Eva both made noises about getting a ticket each in the Kaeo Hunting and Fishing Competition, and we began to loosely formulate a plan.

Landscaping for a living means always working with the ground, and the near-constant wet of a Northland winter becomes a hurdle that year-on-year seems more difficult to surmount. You can never beat the mud! To dedicate two or three days purely to hunting – forcing oneself to break the grind and forget about work – is a huge mental recharge, so I was all-in to tag along and hopefully help to put the dogs onto a good pig.

On the Saturday before the Kaeo competition, disaster struck. On a routine hunt in one of our favourite playgrounds to the west of Kaeo, the dogs had split up and Jazz and her younger brother Black had a pig bailed in a distant gully. On our way to the bail, the other brother Hook suddenly deviated and was gone, chasing his own pig. The gps unit indicated he had 'treed' 900 metres away, and although his bark indicator didn't activate, we surmised he had stopped his quarry. But in this vast wasteland of regenerating pencil mānuka, hakea and gorse, propped up on a blanket of chest-high native rushes and dense ferns, with no roads or very few tracks, he may as well have been in another continent, so long would it take us to get to him. Arriving at the first bail, we were disappointed to find a bone-thin, long-snouted old sow, and were not surprised

when the gps indicated Hook was on his way back. When he finally found us an hour later, his unhappy demeanour spoke that all was not well, and a quick inspection revealed a hole in his groin, where a long, sharp tusk had penetrated almost to his rump. For a relatively soft bailer, the collateral damage for trying to stop and contain boars in the tight runs and tunnels of this energy-sapping 'regen' can be severe, and Hook had certainly come off second best. **Luckily, bleeding was minimal and he was prepared to walk out under his own steam, so we made a beeline to the vet clinic in Kerikeri.**

That night, with Hook stitched back up and curled up on a blanket inside, but weeks away from full recovery, we were forced to change our plans for the following week and 'ration' our remaining two dogs. We decided to limit our hunting to two spots over two days, avoiding fatigue with Jazz and Black.

The Kaeo Competition begins on a Thursday, and as early afternoon rolled around, Zacque and I stood in the same damp gully as the previous weekend's sow capture, trying to find the boar that had done so much damage to Hook. On a prominent pig run in the tangled scrub, Jazz and Black had slowly tracked off on the blunt, rounded prints of a 90lb boar that screamed 'big jaw'. The dogs tracked slowly and methodically away from us, sidling through one gully-head after another. We stood silently, eyes glued to the screens of our respective gps', watching made the two dogs' movements. You could cut the tension in the air with a knife, and at times, I

caught myself holding my breath, so sure was I that a distant bark would be heard at any moment. All the while, the dogs trickled out – not chasing but rather quietly and methodically searching. An hour later they were getting further and further away, and when a public road suddenly entered the equation, hope and expectation were replaced with concern. We considered this well-hunted road outside our territory, so for the dog's safety, we chose to 'tone' them back using the Garmin collars.

It was back to the drawing board, plotting and planning for Friday. Eva had elected to fish with my brother Nick, and they had landed some beautiful mud-fat winter kingfish to around 23 kilograms, so they at least were on the board and provided sashimi and marinated raw fish for dinner!

When the alarm went off in the early hours of Friday morning, I was already awake, thinking about the day ahead. Dogs loaded, coffees in hand, Zacque and I drove south as the first glimmers of dawn appeared on the horizon. **Nearly two hours later, we parked the truck in a remote corner of Northland, collared the dogs then climbed a short, brisk hill to the native forest beyond.**

Eva and Nick had chosen to fish again – this time for big snapper – so we had Jazz and Black for company, plus their younger half-brother named Fox, a relatively new acquisition to my kennels. At less than a year old, but with very little hunting under his belt, everything in life lay ahead of him. Climbing the first hill, the valley opened in front of us, with steep gullies, many side-creeks and very few terraces.



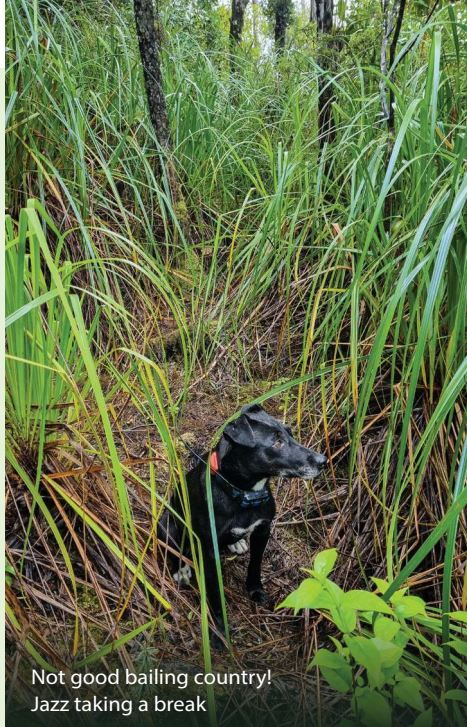
A nikau trunk with interesting plant growths



A few weeks before the Kao Hunt - the boar the dogs were on when the broken-coloured pig escaped

This was true native country, with stands of kauri on the ridges and kahikatea in the gullies, and vast groves of nikau palms which were just starting to berry on the warmer north-facing slopes. We had many such groves marked on the gps, and on this overcast morning we would be targeting them for hungry pigs feeding on the berries.

I had given Jazz and Black a stern talking-to re the outcome of the previous day's shenanigans. They seemed to have listened, as in only the second gully they quietly tracked away, over and gone. We climbed the ridge and sat at the base of a tānekaha tree, and watched the screen as they slowly, methodically sidled the huge native valley, tracking down a pig. Still early and about 800 metres away, we heard one



Not good bailing country! Jazz taking a break

or two sharp barks from Jazz, a short chase then a steady bail from the two black dogs. Dropping into a main creek, we sidled as quickly as we could and closed in on the action. Fox, who was with us, suddenly had a burst of energy and surged ahead, and my comment to Zac was that he would probably try and grab the pig and, therefore break the bail. No truer words spoken! Scarcely 30 metres below us – but out of sight – all barking paused. There was a brief tussle, a big 'scoff' and all went quiet again. One small 'yick' as the pig climbed the opposite face, and we crashed down into the slippery, rocky creek bed to find a white dog with a nasty skin rip, looking very sorry for himself. **Cursing his inexperience, we were forced to climb to a now distant-sounding bail, the young dog following sheepishly behind.**

In the next gully, I hung back, and Zaque quietly manoeuvred into position for a shot. At the noise and echo of the discharge, I scooted down the steep slope, honing in on the sounds of leaves and branches rustling and breaking as a mature native boar kicked his last, and two happy dogs jumping in for a death shake. With average tusks and in poor condition, he was no weigh-in pig, but none-the-less he represented a good catch for the two bailers, and we prepared then stashed him for the carry-out.

The morning was still young, and after a suitable rest, we climbed to the leading ridge and, staying high, followed an old game trail further into the forest. We had in mind a distant plateau where, two weeks before, a solid, broken-coloured boar had sneaked out almost into us as the dogs searched a terrace 400 metres below where he had been nesting. He must have caught a whiff of dog on the vagrant breeze and quietly, with many

pauses, ghosted up the run we were standing on. He stood long enough for me to see that he was mature and a pig worth catching. The dog's searching paid off though, with a smaller boar sporting a good jaw.

On this morning, with a steady breeze from the southwest, we dropped down through a dense supplejack and kiekie 'thicket', closing in on where we assumed his territory was, and the dogs didn't disappoint. Over the edge they went and, obviously tracking scent, began a slow, methodical search of his domain. It was a high basin, densely vegetated with jagged cliffs and bluffs all around, and one of the few places on the map where the contour lines were not stacked on top of one another. With kilometres of downhill in most directions, it was the perfect spot for a wily old boar to see out his days. **But it was not to be on this day for us, as after 40 minutes of thorough searching, the dogs returned to our feet empty-handed. Bugger!**

We elected to stay high, put our best foot forward and continue sidling this huge native valley, dropping down where necessary to help put the dogs onto scent.

Fox seemed oblivious to his injuries and happily followed at our heels, and Jazz and Black still seemed relatively fresh, so there was still hope for the day. It was not over yet!

Scarcely 300 metres along, our luck suddenly changed. Intent on breaking a trail through impenetrable kiekie, I saw Black and Jazz surge ahead into the southerly wind but didn't think anything of it. It seemed like only moments later an intense bail erupted 200 metres down the steep face to our left. Two steady dogs barking hammer and tongs is a joyful sound that only pig hunters can relate to – it stirs an entire simmering pot of mixed emotions with each rising crescendo of noise. Not knowing what they had, we quietly made a beeline towards them.

As we dropped down, slipping and sliding, clinging to roots and tripping over low banks and rotting, collapsed tree limbs, the noise intensified, and the unmistakable smell of boar hung in the air – they had found this pig asleep in his nest. Yet again, Fox suddenly got his wind – injuries forgotten – and bolted ahead to expertly break his second bail of the morning. But this time, there was no real silence, just the woeful warble of one or two dogs trying to bark with a mouthful of back leg, whilst being pulled down a precarious face holding on grimly to the boars back 'wheels'. An impressive drag mark through the ever-present supplejack told of the battle for every inch

of altitude lost, and a solid bail very quickly resumed 90 metres below. Closing in quietly, taking care to soften each footstep, Zacque and I stood side by side on a small bluff bank, peering through nikau and ponga fronds, trying to catch a glimpse of the pig only metres below us. The fact that all of the dogs were fanned out less than ten metres away, barking hard and facing directly towards us, verified that he was indeed close. When he suddenly charged out from under the pongas in front - intent on catching a dog - **we caught our first glimpse of impressive tusks sticking well out, and the weathered head, big shoulders and shrunken hindquarters of an old boar.**

Unaware of the danger lurking above, the pig backed into a supplejack gutter at our feet, head lowered and swinging from side to side following the dogs, and Zacque took his chance and shot down through the top of the shoulders, hitting the vitals and killing the pig almost instantly.

Picking our way through vines to the pig, it was only when Zacque lifted his head out of the leaf litter that we saw he carried a trophy set of thick, polished tusks, marred only by a significant chip on one side that had removed around 8mm off the tip. Old, with a silver mane and skinny, withered

body disproportionately small compared to his head, it was immediately clear he would struggle to make minimum weight. Still, he was a worthy entry with those beautiful ivories.

Black had a long rip on his back leg, which had miraculously not cut through the actual flesh, and Fox had been 'rolled and bowled' with minor rips to his mouth, stomach and legs so, after savouring the moment we gutted our pig, tied him up and started the long carry out, dogs quietly at heel.

After a long drive, we dropped the two dogs at the vet clinic, where they spent the night in expert care, and it was late in the evening before I fed and kenneled my sole remaining dog, Jazz, and made my way inside for a hot shower.

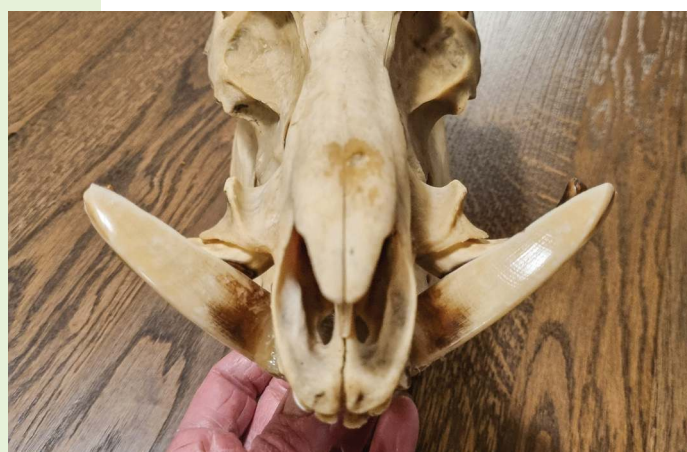
Saturday afternoon at the Kaeo Rugby Club lived up to expectations for this

once-a-year, well organised and keenly anticipated event. Impressive pigs and fish supported by a big crowd, and a memorable hangi was a nice way to unwind after two hectic days. After a few hit-and-miss years with Covid cancellations and weather interruptions, it felt good to stand in the pouring rain and talk dogs, pigs, fish and life with like-minded people.

Bring on 2024!




Zacque Price with his trophy boar




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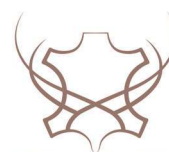


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WRITTEN BY - BRANDON MCMURTRIE

GET IN THE KITCHEN

Venison steak pies baked in a muffin tray

How financial insecurity and the cost-of-living crisis made me a more complete outdoorsman and gave me a new appreciation for the wild game I kill

Since 2019, having returned to university as a mature student pursuing a PhD in psychology, I have consistently found myself in financial tight spots. Higher education pursuits, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis all converged to make life as difficult as possible. Luckily, being raised as a hunter, I had access to a steady supply of free-range, cheap meat.

With the change in perspective that financial insecurity brings and a more intentional attitude towards my hunting and butchering practices, I was able to take the pressure off my grocery bill and simultaneously discovered a greater appreciation for wild game and the kitchen side of hunting, which I had underappreciated for years. It changed the whole hunting process for me. **Getting in the kitchen is now as important and enjoyable to me as the actual hunting itself.**

Although I have always claimed to be primarily a meat hunter, for many years I didn't put much effort into the butchery/culinary aspect of hunting. Aside from the backstrap and the eye

fillets, the rest of a kill was either ground into mince or kept as generic stewing meat. **I was so bad at processing and cooking venison that I would still often buy supermarket meat, and the venison I had harvested would sit in my freezer untouched for months, sometimes getting freezer burn.** I related much more to the actual hunting process itself, the outdoors, the camping, the bush-bashing, the stalking, and the shooting. I think this is likely true for many readers. It wasn't until my finances tightened that I started to take the rest of the process seriously. It occurred to me that I was being wasteful and not utilising the resources I had access to, despite complaining about

the cost of groceries. Most people don't have the skills or equipment to hunt, nor the money to acquire said skills and equipment. As I was raised in a hunting household, with brothers and a dad eager to teach me the ways, I had the ability to cheaply and ethically harvest all the meat I needed. **The only thing stopping me was my attitude and the willingness to put in the work.** So, one day, I decided to commit to eating primarily wild game to save money and take responsibility for where my food came from (I do occasionally buy chicken or fish, but wild venison makes up 90% of my meat consumption). Also, as a bit of a gym junky, this would help manage my macronutrient and protein intake on the cheap.

The only problem was backsteaks and venison stews or curry can get old pretty quickly when you're eating them every day! I had to branch out. I started following meal-prepping blogs and wild game chefs like Hank Shaw (his book Buck Buck Moose is a great intro to the wild game kitchen!). I learned how to process and prepare various cuts of meat for specific dishes. **I decided to revisit the old venison roast - a recipe that had not gone well for me in the past.** The more wild game content and cooking blogs I consumed, the more I fell



My first Sika, a beautifully spotted little yearling

in love with the idea of becoming an amateur wild game chef myself! I loved the idea of really getting to know how to use animal in full, from meat, to organs, to bones.

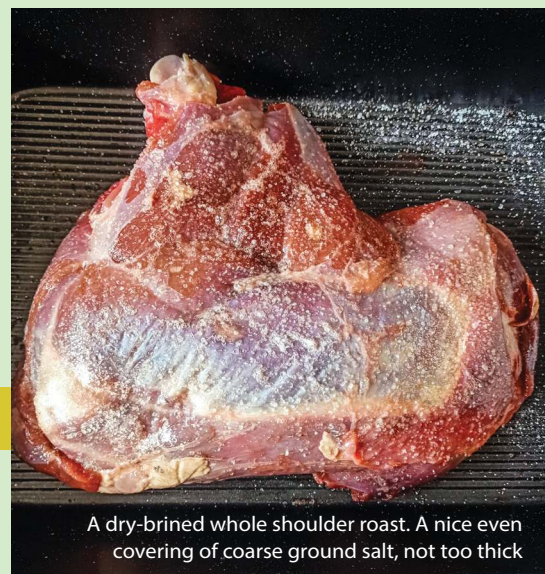
I started out by experimenting with new curries and stir fries. Then I learned how to make sausages. I started doing bulk meal preps of meat pies and burritos. I perfected schnitzel, and eventually even figured out the tricky roast venison, using knuckles (also called the sirloin tip) and whole front quarters (or a whole hindquarter from a small animal). Before long I was eating venison for almost every meal, in a million different, delicious ways. Here are a few of the main tricks I discovered for getting the best out of your venison!

The first thing is to plan ahead and be intentional. When you go out to hunt, you should already have a plan for what you will do with the deer (or other game animal). This means knowing in advance which cuts you want to use and for what recipes. **When I shoot a deer, I am already planning:** when I get home, I'll hang these quarters in the outside fridge, backsteaks go in a bowl in the inside fridge, and in a few days, I will grind most of the hindquarters into mince (which means for much of the animal I can be a little more casual about the tidiness of my butchering). Five kilograms of that mince will go into sausages (which means I need to rehydrate my casings and buy a few kilos of fatty pork), and I will freeze

the front quarters whole for roasts. When it comes to planning the meat processing stage (both the field and kitchen stages), it helps if you know what recipes you want to cook. If you plan on lots of nachos and burritos, you know you can grind a lot of the meat into mince, but if you plan on a few roasts, then keep the sirloin tip and a shoulder whole on the bone, and so on.

DRY BRINING

When it comes to cooking venison (and any other large game found in New Zealand), getting the cut out of the freezer two days or more in advance and salting it a couple of times before cooking will make a difference in terms of tenderness. An even covering, not too thick, of ground coarse salt does the trick. This is called 'dry brining'. The salt pulls water to it and forms a brine, which soaks back into the meat and adds flavour, helps break down the muscle tissue and retain moisture in the long run. A benefit of dry, as opposed to wet brining, is that it doesn't result in an overpoweringly salty cut, as can occur with wet brines. I dry brine any whole cuts, even those I intend to cube and put in stir fry or curry. Any cut that is not ground into mince will benefit from a few days in the fridge and a couple of good salts. Another great trick for tender, juicy meat in stir fry, curry, or stew



A dry-brined whole shoulder roast. A nice even covering of coarse ground salt, not too thick

(also for meat-gravy filling in pies) is to roll the cubes in flour and then brown them on high heat in a splash of oil before adding to the main recipe.

ROAST

Many of you will have heard that "low and slow" is the key when it comes to roasts. This is entirely the wrong advice for venison. For stews and curries, in which the meat is cooked submerged in moisture, low and slow can be an excellent method to infuse the flavour of all the ingredients into the meat, and many of these ingredients will have an acidic quality to them which help break down the meat and keep it juicy.



My first ever batch of sausages!



Ingredients for a hearty bone stock. Leave a bit of meat on the bones for added goodness. Use as a base for recipes, or a delicious paleo style hot drink



Venison mince pies, made using the foldover method

However, if you put a whole shoulder in the oven and roast it low and slow for hours, it will dry out and turn into leather. When I roast venison, either sirloin tips or my personal favourite, whole bone-in-shoulder, I roast it like a basic lamb roast. **After ageing and salting the roast for a few days, I put it in the oven on traditional bake at about 180 degrees Celsius.** For a moderate-sized roast, 50 minutes to an hour should be enough. Contrary to the low and slow mantra, always try to roast your venison for as short a time as possible, on a good high. It's honestly better to get it out, start cutting into it, discover that it is a little underdone and have to put it back in for a bit, than to overcook it and spend your night chewing on boot leather. A bit of pink around the bone is ideal. To get a nice crust on the roast, crush heaps of garlic, add your choice of generic herb seasoning, whisk in a bowl with some olive oil, and slather the roast before putting it in the oven. In short, age and salt the meat, then roast it in a nice hot oven, opting for a faster rather than longer cooking time, and you will have roasts as tender as any good lamb roast, albeit with less fat. **If you want, you can finish it off with a blast of the fan-forced option to get the oil and garlic rub to crisp up properly.** Pre-roar deer are especially good for roasts, as they have more fat (and don't listen to Steven Rinella- deer fat can be delicious), but I've made excellent roasts out of some pretty lean mid-winter animals, as well. This method works so well that even reheating the leftovers for roast venny sandwiches doesn't toughen up the meat; it stays nice and tender all week for some great work lunches!

MEAL PREPARATION

In terms of meal prepping for breakfasts and lunches, I love doing huge batches of burritos or mince pies. For the pies, you don't need a pie maker; I use the simple turnover method seen in the picture above or even use a muffin tray (opening photo). Either way, pies and burritos require you to fry up a large batch of mince, add some diced onion, and your favourite seasoning (I like a spicy Mexican type of seasoning). For burritos, add some kidney beans if you like them, to cheaply extend the recipe (they're like \$1 a tin). Then, lay a burrito on a small sheet of tinfoil, spoon in the meat, sprinkle on some cheese, drizzle some sweet chilli sauce, roll the burrito, and then roll it up in the tinfoil. You can bang out about 30 burritos in an hour or two. **Load up the freezer, and you have a cheap, healthy, wild-game based breakfast or lunch ready to go!** A quick zap in the microwave, and you have a filling, cheesy, sweet, spicy, hearty meal on the go.

It's a similar process for mince pie turnovers.. Add your favourite flavours and ingredients and cook up a huge batch of mince. Cut a circle of supermarket pastry and spoon your meat filling into the centre. Fold the pastry over and press the edges together with a fork, then wipe with an egg/water mixture (two tablespoons of water and a couple of eggs, whisked). Bake in the oven at about 180°C until the pastry puffs, crisps up and looks nice and golden. Wrap in cling film or Ziplock bags, and freeze (or eat right away, as they're amazing right out of the oven!). For the muffin-tray pies I use small cubes of venison and make

basically any meat gravy recipe from the internet. Now you have a freezer full of pies that are way healthier and cheaper than the old Big Ben's or bakery pies. And they are incredible! I get mine out of the freezer in the evening, and in the morning, I zap them in the microwave (it doesn't affect the quality), hit them with a strong dose of tomato sauce, and have myself a great Kiwi breakfast!

SAUSAGES

Sausages are a more complex project requiring a sausage stuffing attachment for your meat grinder (just a simple tube that attaches to the end). I won't give a full breakdown of how to make sausages here, but it is pretty easy once you've had a go. All you need is to order your sausage casings and flavouring packets, grind and mix your sausage, and then stuff it into links! Dunninghams has a wide range of great sausage flavourings, which you can order online. I also like Oskar Butchers' flavourings. I order most of my casings and flavourings from Oskar Butcher, and they're good for beginners because they email a how-to document telling you how to mix and stuff your sausages - it's how I learned! **They give you instructions on how much venison and pork to use (I do about 70/30 ratio of venison to pork) and how to mix the flavourings and stuff the sausages.** Although some people put pork fat in their sausages, I just buy a cheap pork shoulder and add that. There is enough fat in the pork shoulder to keep the sausage from being too dry, and it's easier to find and easier to work with than straight fat. Once you have sausages, they



Caul fat wrapped venison patties! Chopped onion, garlic powder, egg, and a few breadcrumbs are nice in a patty



A freezer full of ready-to-eat pies and burritos!



It can be good to leave sausages overnight to really set the flavours and for the casings to dry a little

are surprisingly versatile beyond the good old barbeque. Bangers and mash, devilled sausages, or any of a variety of sweet or savoury baked sausage recipes are my go-to!

WOBBLY BITS

Eventually, I even got into using the wobbly bits; eating the heart, liver, and kidneys, and using the caul fat to wrap roasts and burger patties. I also bring out the larger bones, saw them into sections, and make huge batches of stock or bone broth. It's great for liquid-based recipes, and bone broth is just a healthy and delicious hot drink on a cold winter's day! Taking a thermos of homemade bone broth to work on a cold

morning is perfect, and it makes you feel amazing. Buck Buck Moose by Hank Shaw has a great section on both offal and stock. But you don't need to get into offal and bone broth immediately if you're the type of hunter who typically just takes the backsteaks and a leg or two. But I would encourage you to upskill and expand your range, not just for your wallet and your health, but to avoid wastage and for the fun and the appreciation for nature that comes with being an all-rounder in a more traditional hunting lifestyle.

It's been almost four years now since I decided to live primarily on wild game as my meat source. I wouldn't even guess how much money I have saved in that time. Even with

the occasional helicopter trip into the backcountry, I would definitely say I'm in the green regarding the amount spent on hunting vs saved on groceries. But the best part of all of this was the shift in perspective it gave me. Hunting is a much more intentional activity involving many aspects of my life. It put me in touch with my food in a way that I thought I was, back in my early days of hunting. And although I now love hunting more than ever, the hunting itself is only one aspect of the more significant lifestyle. One that revolves around food, health, and meaningful family meals. **The killing of game occurs in the wild, but the hunt begins and ends in the kitchen.**



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JOURNEY'S END STATION

WRITTEN BY ~ ADDY JEFFRIES

“Get up, we’re going on a walk,” I heard Dad say

As I rose from my sleep, I looked outside to see it is a cold, foggy morning, still just dark on our farm. As Dad, Hunter, Sarsha and I leave the hut we heard a stag roar.

We continued our walk, when suddenly we stopped in our tracks as a nearby stag let out a loud and powerful roar. Dad roared back, but it wasn't a casual roar, it was a challenge roar. We waited a few minutes... but nothing in return,

the mob of deer had long gone.

We walked through thick ti tree, then down a hill that felt never-ending. Suddenly, we hear a thud! I turned around to see Sarsha had fallen

over. I knew it was going to happen, after all, it was like we were billy goats on a mountain track. We stopped on the hill for a couple of minutes to eat mandarins, and as I looked up I saw a beautiful, big stag and two hinds on the cliff face opposite us.

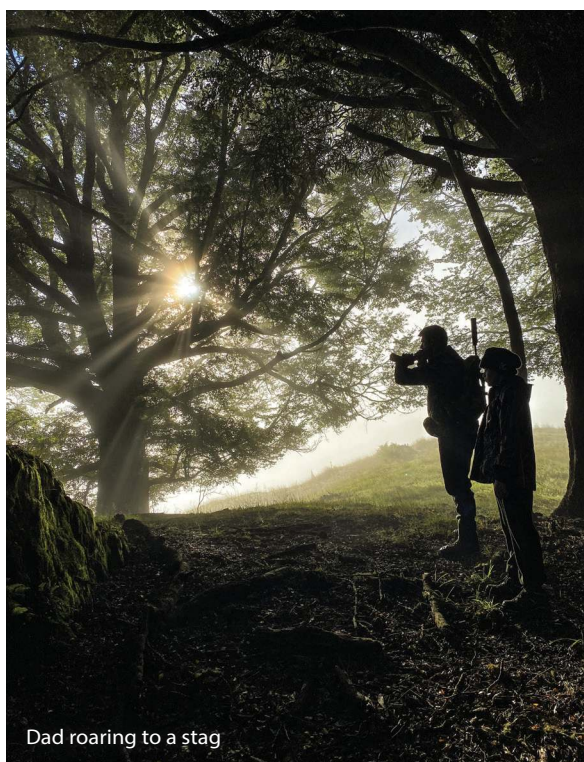
We were finally off the uneven hill, us kids complaining, **“we’re tired, we’re hungry, we’re thirsty, my legs are burning!”** My Dad told us to “stop complaining.” My mouth was so dry from no water and heavy breathing



The spiker when I saw it



Hunter, Sarsha and I with the deer



Dad roaring to a stag



when finally, we came across a freshwater creek. I cupped my hands together and took a sip of the crisp water. My hands went numb and my lips went purple. *"Omg, that's freezing!"* I said, shivering.

After walking for what felt like forever, we heard a faint roar. We continued our walk to a clearing in the bush. A hind runs, and then we heard a roar, so we turned around... nothing. As I turned back around in front of me I saw a spiker about 20 metres away. I took out my phone and snapped a photo. I then whispered *"Hunter, Sarsha and Dad, turn around super slowly."* As they do my Dad passed me the gun. **My heart was racing then 'Bang!' I hit it, but it ran.**

My Dad followed a blood trail in the bush while Sarsha, Hunter and I stay on the

edge of the bush. We heard a gunshot, *"Addy, down here."* We find Dad to see he had finished off the spiker as I had wounded it, but had unfortunately blown off one of the antlers. I took multiple photos, and then we gutted it and chopped its head off to make it lighter. I wanted to carry the deer, but it was way too big and heavy, and even Dad struggled. I carried the head instead.

We walked back to the hut, stopping multiple times. My Dad was walking as slow as a snail - well at least that's what it felt like. We got to a massive tree and decided to leave the tia there and carry on walking. As we were on the home stretch, the sun had just started peeking through the clouds. Mum and Kyllie finally noticed us and saw that we were absolutely exhausted, so Mum came and

picked us up on the 4-wheeler. Once we got to the hut we tricked Kyllie and said we got nothing - then all of us excitedly yelled *"just kidding!"*

Dad and I went back to get the spiker then took it to the chiller.

When we got back to the hut, 'Sunny Face Lodge', Dad and I walked inside to get a well-deserved cold drink and then sit outside. *"Cheers!"* We all yelled. Then Hunter, Sarsha and I jumped into the flax bushes as we found a random burst of energy. *"What a wonderful sunny day,"* Mum said. *"I love Journeys' End Station,"* Kyllie said with a relaxed tone, *"it's just gorgeous!"* She certainly wasn't wrong. *"Yeah, it's a lovely day, but it's just started. We still have a massive walk to go on,"* Dad said, while laughing away.





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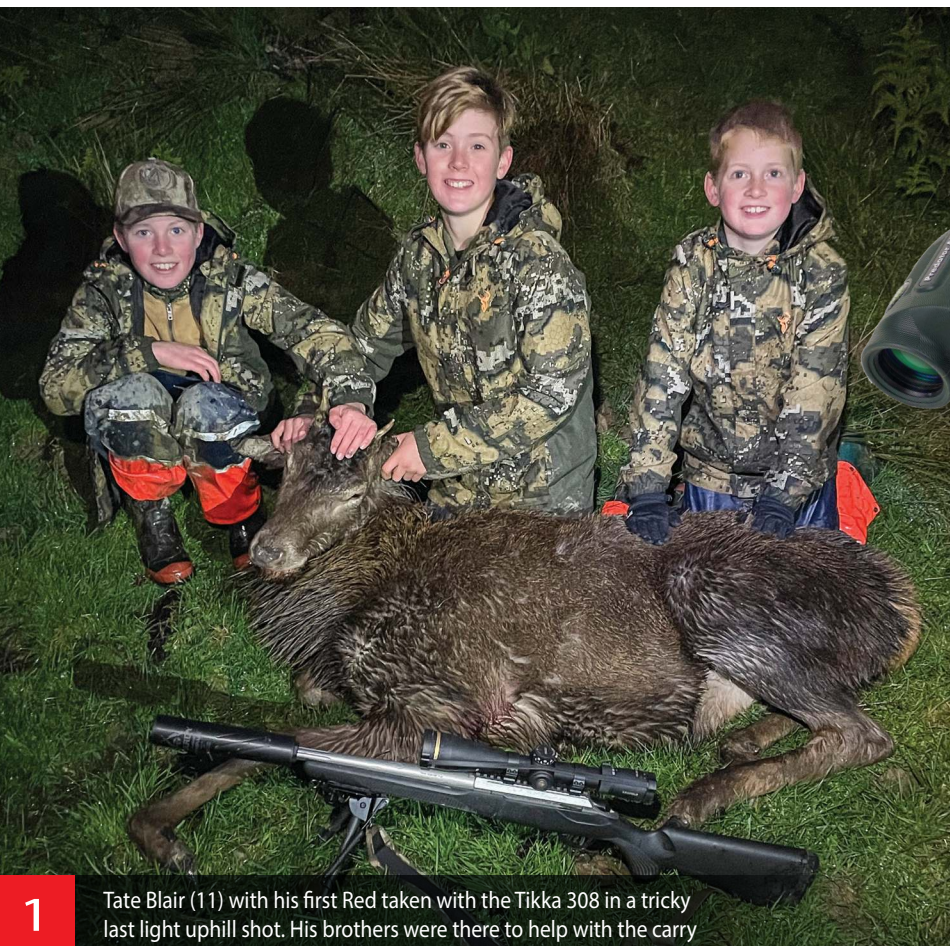


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Gallery

WINNER



1

Tate Blair (11) with his first Red taken with the Tikka 308 in a tricky last light uphill shot. His brothers were there to help with the carry



2

Aaron Johnson shot this beast at 150m with a Tikka T3 308

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3

Ben Gaddum (8) with a yearling hind shot with a Tikka T3 308 in Mangatu Forest, Gisborne

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Jack Sanders (13) and brother Tomas Sanders (10) with a yearling hind shot in the early hours of the day in North Canterbury. Jack used his Dad's Tikka T3 7mm-08 to shoot the deer.

4



5

Ash Cromwell shot this young buck after work in the back hills of Cromwell with his Tikka T3X 270



6

Paul Nickson with spring venison taken using a Sako 85 308



8

Parker Collins with a great stag taken in Otago on a family hunting trip. Shot with a Tikka T3



Beaudane and Coen Willemsen having a big day in the hills culling goats near Mangakino

7

PERVERSE CREEK

WRITTEN BY
CAM MCKAY | POINTS SOUTH

TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

Looking up and
across the Barlow

High on the sunny flanks of the Barlow River and sitting under the 1996m peak of The Great Unknown, is the Tahr Ballot landing site for Perverse Creek

A relatively short flight as far as tahr ballots go, but this proximity to the coast also means that in nice weather it will be prone to that daily cloud rolling in as it builds along the coastline. With basecamp situated at 1350 meters, this is one of the higher elevation landing sites.

You'll be drying out gear and soaking in the sun whilst those Landsborough hunters will be shivering and lucky to catch any at all. **But the flipside here is that you'll be fully exposed to any**

weather from the south and the west and that's generally where the bad stuff comes from. So, it's certainly a place you want to be in and out of inside that good weather window, and before any serious snowfall hits the ground.

Fly your own firewood in as there's really

none available around camp, and with a bit of a shitty walk for water it pays to take a bucket so you can supply the whole camp.

Up and over the ridge from Perverse Creek and into the Perth is the Adverse Glacier and creek, and it takes little imagination as to why it is named as such. Which also explains why this area is seldom traversed, apart from a few mountaineering parties accessing The Garden of Eden Ice Plateau.

The tahr numbers are certainly lower than in years past and you will see the occasional chamois, **but unless your more than comfortable in steeper terrain the scope is a little limited.** Directly below camp offers some slips and scrub to watch over without having to go far at all, with more of this continuing to the north. Further to the north if you can navigate your way out the other side of Perverse Creek itself, you'll be looking

The productive scrub
country below camp

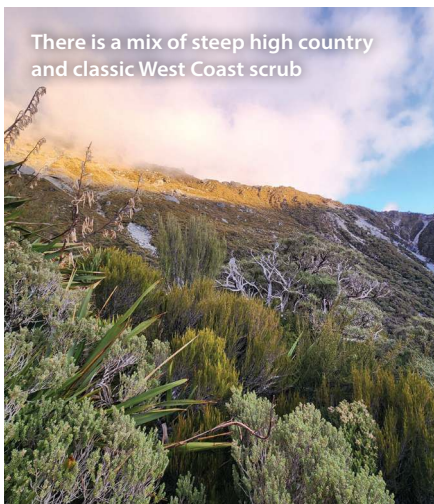


at the benched country above the Upper Barlow. Just keep your eyes open for the guys hunting from the Upper Barlow, as they too will be accessing this country from the northern end.

To the south of camp is a series of steep guts and generally a bunch of "no man's land", so keep this in mind when you do spot animals over there.



There is a mix of steep high country and classic West Coast scrub



At 1350m this campsite is one of the highest in the ballot blocks

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CRYSTAL BIV

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Crystal Biv looking over
to Diedrichs Range
Paulette Birchfield

In the last issue we looked at Yeats Ridge Hut on the Toaroha Range in central Westland

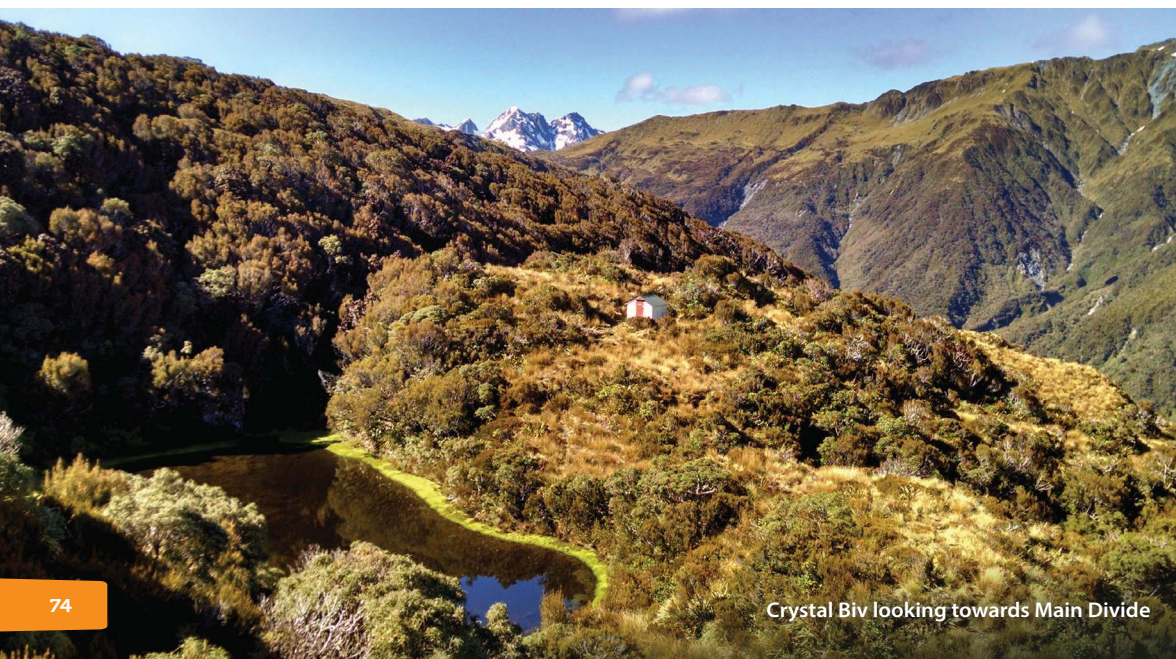
Mention was made in the article of Crystal Biv which lies further along the range and like Yeats, is another of the community-maintained huts in the valley.

The last 20 years has seen an increasing number of partnerships develop between high country user groups and the financially stretched Department of Conservation. **The Toaroha Valley is a good example of this model working well.** DOC looks after the huts and tracks in the main valley and the Zit Saddle route, and the outdoor community keeps an eye on the remaining three lower-use structures (Yeats, Crystal and Mullins Basin Hut) and their access routes.

When Crystal Biv was designated as minimal maintenance by DOC in 2004 it was only getting one visit every 2-3 years and had significant structural issues at the back end caused by leakage around the window. The newly formed Permolat Group took an active interest around this time and in 2009 we recut the old NZFS track up to the biv from the valley. This hadn't been maintained for over 30 years, limiting access to the biv to tops traverses only. I did some framing and

floor repairs to the back end in 2014, but they weren't enough to stop water getting in. In 2019 Rob Brown of the Back Country Trust arranged a major overhaul using BCT funds and as a result, the biv is in excellent condition and should remain that way for many years to come.

Crystal Biv is indeed a gem and takes its name from the large creek catchment on its upriver side. It is located in scattered alpine scrub on a bench next to a picturesque tarn at 1070m. It is a tranquil setting with great views out over the Toaroha Valley to the Diedrichs Range. The biv can be accessed in 8-9 hours from the Toaroha road end by a fit party, either via the main-valley track, or over the tops from Yeats Hut. The latter is the slightly quicker of the two routes when conditions are good but



Crystal Biv looking towards Main Divide



By Paulette Birchfield



requires a climb to 1300m. Since the rebuild traffic to Crystal has increased significantly and in 2021 a record 20 visits were logged. Much of this stems from a growing interest in some of the longer alpine circuits in the area

Crystal Biv is a NZFS B55 two-person design, built in 1960 according to Bill Johnson who helped with the construction. The original was lined with tar paper and chicken wire and had two sleeping platforms which were removed early on. In 2019 the roof was replaced, the leaky louvre window was replaced with a single pane one, the interior was lined with ply, and a small cooking bench installed. The biv has two mattresses and water comes from any of the several small tarns close by. There is limited cell phone reception from the site.

The Toaroha is not a huge catchment but it is well endowed huts and bivouacs. Tops travel is relatively easy and there are some beautiful alpine basins that can be traversed below the main range. For the more adventurous there are routes to several remote destinations including Adventure and Toaroha Saddle Bivs, and Top Kokatahi Hut. Deer and chamois can be found in lowish numbers on the open tops, all along the Range.

More information can be found at <https://www.remotehuts.co.nz/crystal-biv.html>



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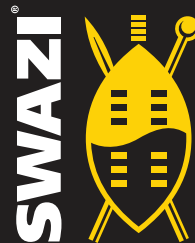


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New Zealand Deerstalkers Association

GWYN THURLOW - NZDA



Wild Pig *Sus scrofa*

Male = Boar

Female = Sow

Young = Piglet

Feral or wild pigs were the first intentionally introduced big game animals to successfully establish in New Zealand. Today, they are probably the most widely distributed game animal we have and are pursued by hunters all over the country.

Initial Liberations:

The first pigs to touch our soil were a pair gifted to a Māori tribe in 1769 by French explorer Jean de Surville. There are no records for what happened to these pigs, but one would imagine their fates were pretty much sealed. In 1773, Captain James Cook released pigs and goats in Queen Charlotte Sound – an event widely regarded as the first proper introduction. This is obviously why our pigs are often referred to as "Captain Cookers". Further introductions occurred in the years that followed, mainly through whalers and sealers releasing and trading them with local Māori tribes when they were encountered.

By 1840, wild pigs had become firmly established in New Zealand's forests and have remained ever since. To this day, wild pork is an important food source, like venison, for many Kiwi families. Every weekend scores of pig hunters are out in the hills chasing boar, which is an adrenaline filled sport and can become a way of life.

Colour phases:

Wild pigs have a wide range of colourations. Most are black, but other

colours such as ginger, brown, white, smoky 'blue' and grey exist, as well as spotted combinations of these colours.

Size Matters:

Pigs are traditionally compared amongst pig hunters by their gutted weight (in pounds). A 100lb pig is respectable; a 200lb boar is a trophy size animal. Joining the "2-Ton Club" is a benchmark achievement for pig hunters, but the size of a boar's tusks, both drawn (i.e., removed from the jaw) and undrawn (left in the jaw) are also important.

Hogs and Dogs:

Wild pigs have been hunted with the aid of dogs ever since their introduction.

Using pig dogs can be much more successful than conventional rifle hunting, as it allows pigs to be hunted in scrubby, thick bush that would otherwise be impossible to hunt. There are generally three types of pig dogs, all purpose bred: "finders", "bailers" and "holders", which consist of many different 'traits'. The job of each pig dog type is quite self-explanatory. The finder's job is to locate a pig, and a bailer's job is to "bail" the pig: essentially keeping it in one place by constantly barking. Quite often dogs will be both finders and bailers. These dogs are generally small and fast - necessary traits to avoid the sharp tusks of large boars. Holders are usually much larger, stronger breeds such as mastiffs, whose job is to simply run in and grab the pig to hold it until the hunter arrives. Once the hunter arrives on the scene, the pig is dispatched with either a sticking knife or gun, depending on the situation and size of the pig.

What is a trophy pig tusk?

Tusks are assessed for size, overall length and

length of the grind, either 'drawn' or 'undrawn'. To be entered in the NZDA Record Books, a wild boar needs tusks with the following criteria:

Undrawn: 20 NZDA Score or more than 3" long

Drawn: 28 NZDA Score or more than 7 1/2" long

The current New Zealand records are:

Undrawn: 31 3/8 NZDA Score taken by A. and D.C. Siver in the King Country in 1993.

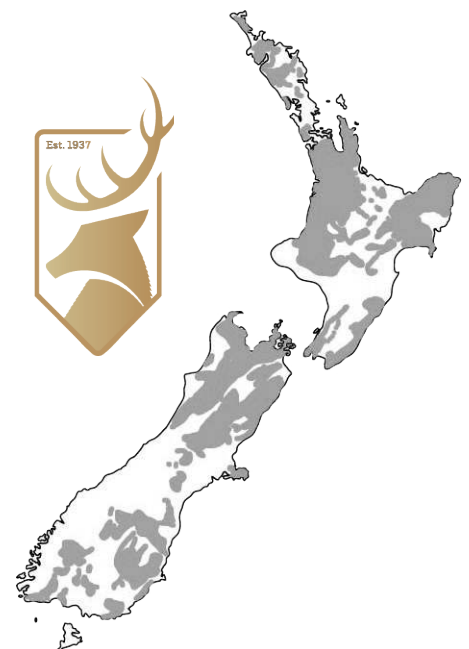
Drawn: 45 6/8 NZDA Score taken by J. Gillespie in the Kakanui Mountains in 1914.

An interesting quirk of the Record Books is that it is the NZDA Score method which is used, not the DS method which is used for all other big game records.

Further Reading

Holden, Phillip (1982). The Wild Pig. Hodder and Stoughton.

Cuthbertson, Ken (1974). Pighunting in New Zealand. A.H. and A.W. Reed.





BOAR



YOUNG BOAR

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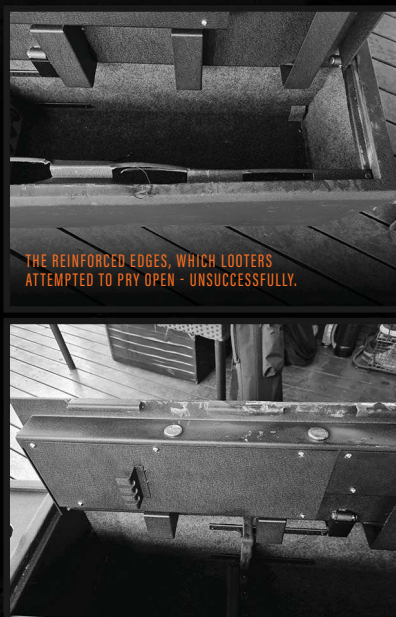
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- Oleg

”

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THE LATEST IN SIG SAUER RANGEFINDERS

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

We have reviewed many Sig Sauer products over the last few years. They are proving to be a very innovative company whose products are aimed at the shooter/hunter who wants to use ballistics to his maximum advantage

They make a range of both monocular and binocular rangefinders with a range of features and specs depending on your intended use. We recently received a pretty full range of their rangefinders, the KILO3K, 4K and 5K monoculars, and the 6K HD and 6K-HD Compact binoculars.

MONOCULARS

Starting with the monoculars, obviously their ranging capability goes up as you go up the range, with the name being the maximum range in yards to a reflective target in good conditions that each unit is capable of - e.g. the KILO4K is rated at up to 1600yds on deer, 2000yds on trees and 4000yds to something like a reflective road sign. Sig Sauer also make a KILO8K monocular and KILO10K-ABS HD binocular which is about the most capable readily available and affordable civilian rangefinder available at the moment, but this sort of capability is not really needed in a hunting unit.

We reviewed the KILO5K monocular very thoroughly back in issue 88, so we won't go over in detail all the features they all share here again. Briefly, they all have inboard sensors for temperature, pressure and incline, and all include Applied Ballistics software (AB Ultralite in the monoculars tested here) so they can generate your exact ballistic solution in a range of output options from MOA, Mils and Angle Modified Range (TBR) to enable you to make that shot. They also all Bluetooth to external atmospheric and ballistic calculators units like Kestrels

etc to provide an alternate ballistic solution if you prefer, and to Sig Sauer scopes with the BDX feature to provide you with a corrected aiming point on your reticle. **They all have a range of modes to allow you to maximize rangefinding performance in various conditions from rain/cloud to intervening vegetation etc.** Their laser beam divergences are all similar – around 1.25 by .2 MRAD.

And so now to the differences. The 3K and the 4K have 6x22mm monoculars, whereas the 5K has a 7x25mm. The 4K has Sig's optical image stabilization, a first in rangefinders other than a Nikon model since discontinued, which certainly makes the smaller handheld units much easier to observe and get an accurate range through. The OIS does use more battery power so the 4K has a CR123 instead of the CR2 all the others use.



Kilo 5k monocular



Kilo 6k HD



Kilo 6k 8x32 compact HD



Kilo 4k, 3k and 5k



Kilo 4k with optical image stabilisation

is 1.5 by .6 MRAD, but despite this being larger than the monoculars, they managed longer ranges to the typical deer, bush, scrub and rock ranging targets encountered out hunting compared to their maximum reflective target capabilities. **Generally larger divergence equals less range capability.** I'm picking this is due to the bigger receivers possible in the larger objective lenses of the binoculars. The 32mm objective compact version is available in both 8x and 10x magnification, whereas the full size 42mm objective version is 10x only.

better resolution. **This is obviously comparing apples with apples, eg optics of the same brand and quality.**

You are quicker into action with the built-in rangefinding unit though, especially if the animal shifts a bit and you have to re-range it. No putting down the binoculars and up with the monocular rangefinder, range, then back to the binoculars. You can also find the animal you need to get a range to far quicker in binoculars than through the monocular with a smaller field of view and less resolution. **While I generally use 10x42 rangefinding binoculars, the KIL06-HD Compact is one of the smallest and lightest models on the market I've seen of sufficient resolution and ranging ability to tempt me on trips when I'm trying to save every bit of weight possible.**

And then of course if you need the maximum range to non-reflective targets in a competitive shooting situation, then you can step up to the KIL08K and the top of the line KIL010k-ABS HD. They also have the Applied Ballistics Elite ballistic engine for the most precise longer range firing solutions.

I'd have to say Sig Sauer pretty much have an affordable rangefinder for everyone, no matter their individual hunting/shooting requirements. They may not win every individual optic spec against their opposition but taking all things into consideration, they come up trumps in most comparisons. **No one else has put together such a comprehensive line-up!**



BINOCULARS

The Kilo 6K binoculars are a step up on the very good K3000 BDX we reviewed back in issue 73. Optically they have fluorite HD glass for greater contrast and resolution. They still have the similar bluey/green tinge to the image which some like and some hate. Sig say this is to provide a clearer image in bright light but conversely the criticism is it detracts from the lowlight image. They have the same Applied Ballistics Ultralite software as the monoculars and the ability to Bluetooth to external atmospheric and ballistic units and their own BDX scopes. Their laser divergence

After using all of these models the two that stood out to me were the KIL04K and the KIL06K-HD compact. The OIS system in the 4K made this a standout of the monoculars and I think I might have to find space for them any time I am prepared to give up the convenience of binoculars with a built in rangefinder in them. There is always an optical compromise the minute you incorporate a rangefinder into your binoculars due to the electronics - in particular the receiver and the display. We have found on many occasions if one of us is using the best binoculars without a built in rangefinder next to one of us using binoculars with a rangefinder, on average the person without will find more game due to the

MODEL	MAGNIFICATION	OBJECTIVE	WEIGHT	MAX RANGE DEER	MAX RANGE TREES	MAX RANGE REFLECTIVE	RRP
KIL03K	6x	22mm	152gms/5.4oz	1500yds	1800yds	3000yds	\$849.99
KIL04K	6x	22mm	207gms/7.3oz	1600yds	2000yds	4000yds	\$1,499.99
KIL05K	7x	25mm	230gms/8.1oz	2000yds	2500yds	5000yds	\$1,799.99
KIL06K HD	10x	42mm	923gms/32.6oz	2000yds	4000yds	6000yds	\$3,099.99
KIL06K HD COMPACT	8x	32mm	719gms/25.4oz	2500yds	3000yds	6000yds	\$2,349.99
KIL08K-ABS	7x	25mm	230gms/8.1oz	2000yds	2500yds	8000yds	\$3,299.99
KIL010K-ABS HD	10x	42mm	923gms/32.6oz	3000yds	4000yds	10,000yds	\$5,599.99



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STONE GLACIER LOAD SHELF PACKS

WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

This intro from the Stone Glacier website sums up their reason for being:

Stone Glacier manufactures premium outdoor equipment, most notably backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, and technical apparel. Stone Glacier products are the result of 15 years of solo sheep hunts from the Dall country of Alaska to the unlimited districts of Montana's Beartooth Wilderness. Minimizing pack and gear weight increases usable load, which in turn extends your range in the backcountry. Stone Glacier's quest for ultralight backpacking gear began 15 years ago and has been a slow and organic process of development, testing, and refining. The brand's goal has been straightforward: build the lightest, most durable gear using only the toughest technical materials available. After hundreds of miles of testing on the trail, years of research and design, this goal has been accomplished. Stone Glacier—redefining the capabilities of ultralight.

Based in Boseman Montana, Kurt Racicot started the business in a garage on the west side of town.

From those small beginnings, Stone Glacier has evolved into one of the leading technical hunting equipment manufacturers in the USA. We first encountered their packs when we had some Alaskan hunters staying with us down here on their first tahr hunt. They raved about how good the gear was and as these guys were genuine mountain hunters, their opinions carried some weight with us. Up until now, the only way to get a Stone Glacier pack was to import it yourself, but now NZ Asia (who are also the Leupold importers) are bringing an initial but growing range of Stone Glacier products into New Zealand.

The first two packs available on the New Zealand scene are the Col 4800 (79 litre) and the Sky 5900 (96 litre). These are both load shelf packs, where the main bag isn't

permanently attached to the frame and they have a fabric, expandable "shelf" at the bottom of the frame. This allows you to loosen the attachment straps creating space between the frame and the bag, and sit large loads of meat or anything else you can't fit inside the pack, on top of the "shelf". **This is an almost essential system for North American hunters who have to carry out every scrap of useable meat off their kills.**

FRAMES

Starting with the frame, Stone Glacier make two carbon fibre options - the 110gm lighter Krux for loads up to 68kgs and the XCurve for the heaviest loads over 150 pounds/68kgs. Both the packs supplied have the heavier duty frame.

The XCurve uses 4 carbon fiber composite stays in an "X" configuration, curved

to match the lumbar and upper back contours for increased weight distribution and comfort under heavy load. This "X" stay configuration is designed to increase both vertical frame strength and minimise lateral shift. **The padded hip belt has double purchase adjustment for easy tightening, with a releasable locking buckle. The padded wings have upper and lower tensioners to enable you to cup them to more precisely fit your hips.** The padded shoulder straps are adjustable up and down, as is the chest strap. The XCurve's frame-only weight is 3lbs/1.36 kgs, and the lighter Krux is 2.75lbs/1.25kgs. The frames come in three belt sizes - small, medium and large. Stone Glacier say any of their removable bags will fit either of their frames.

BAGS

Now to the bags. The Sky 5900 has one large draw string closure main compartment, a tall vertical front pocket for a spotting scope or similar, and a single large pocket in the top flap. The main compartment is accessible via the top as usual, or via an inverted U-shaped zip that goes right up, across and down again. The front pocket has a centre vertical zip. Both front and top flap pockets are "shaped", in that a tightly stuffed main compartment doesn't squash them flat. This is an issue with many packs we've used, and

makes accessing gear in them impossible. There is a series of 14 compression straps - four on each side, four at the top and two at the bottom - that attach the bag to the frame to cinch everything up tight and take up the slack when you have nothing on the load shelf. There are also two horizontal straps right across the front. All up weight with the XCurve frame is 2.28kgs.

The Col 4800 also has a single large compartment and a shaped vertical front pocket with a side zip - but it has no top flap.

The main compartment is only accessible through the inverted U zip. There is also a little horizontal pocket above the vertical pocket, but this one is not shaped. The 4800 has 10 compression/attachment straps, one less on each side and two less on top than the 5900. An internal sleeve is designed to take a spotter, but I would still use the vertical front pocket personally. Weight with XCurve frame is 2.13kgs.

Luke and I used these packs on a mid-winter trip in the Canterbury high country and found them extremely well made and very comfortable as you would expect, especially when we had them loaded up with meat on the way out. They are certainly very versatile once you get the hang of getting all the straps adjusted correctly - there is an awful lot of straps! Having so many side straps allows a very secure rifle carrying system. And the front cross straps allow even more gear attachment options. The best volume and versatility for weight is certainly the Sky 5900, but the Col 4800 was easier to use. **When the packs are fairly full and everything is cinched down tight the system works well.**

It was a little tedious to stop everything flopping around on the frame if using the pack as a daypack - when you often won't have it bulging full and you're regularly getting stuff in and out to glass etc. We found we had to continually loosen most/all of the straps to access your gear then cinch them up tight again every time we wanted something out. If

the side straps were attached at the frame side of the bag instead of the outer side away from the frame, you could leave these straps tight and the other straps loose for easy access and still minimise the bag flopping around on the frame.

The load shelf and multiple straps certainly makes these packs extremely versatile as a general purpose hunting

pack. Next year NZ Asia are bringing in two new Stone Glacier extreme mountain hunting packs that I'm really looking forward to seeing. The Terminus 7000 and 8700 are a conventional bag stitched to frame, rather than a separate load shelf. **At 115l/1.79kg and 142l/1.93kg, these are the best volume for weight and spec packs I've ever seen!**



Emil wearing the Col 4800/79l (L) and Luke wearing the Sky 5900/96l (R) on a mid-winter trip. Both packed for a big day trip after setting up camp

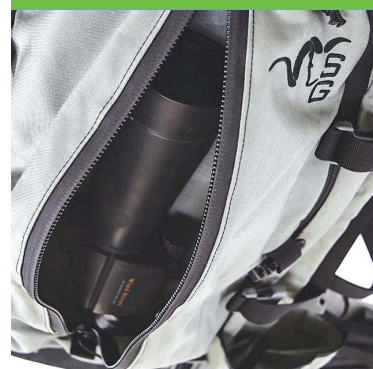
The inverted U-shaped zip for accessing the main compartment in both packs



The Col 4800 opened up, showing the internal spotting scope pocket



The front pocket with a vertical zip for a spotting scope on the Sky 5900



**SKY
5900**



**COL
4800**



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MODEL	RANGE	FOV	MAG	SENSOR	NZD inc Gst RRP Display
TQ50 2.0	2600m	8.7° × 7.0°	2.6 - 20.8, x8	640 × 512, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$6,799.00
TQ35 2.0	1800m	12.5° × 10.0°	1.8, x8	640 × 512, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$5,599.00
TH35P 2.0	1800m	7.5° × 5.7.0°	2.14, x8	384 × 288, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$4,499.00
TH25P 2.0	1200m	10.5° × 7.9°	1.53, x8	384 × 288, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$3,999.00
TE25 2.0	1200m	7.0° × 5.3°	3.25, x8	256 × 192, 12 μm NETD < 35mK	\$2,399.00
TE19 2.0	1000m	9.2° × 6.9°	2.47, x8	256 × 192, 12 μm NETD < 35mK	\$1,899.00

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PANTHER 2.0

MODEL	RANGE	FOV	MAG	SENSOR	NZD inc Gst RRP Display
PQ50L 2.0	2600m	8.78° × 7.03°	2.6 - 20.8, x8	640×512, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$7,999.00
PQ35L 2.0	1700m	12.52° × 10.03°	1.77 - 14.16, x8	640×512, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$7,299.00
PH50L 2.0	2500m	5.28° × 3.96°	4.22 - 33.76, x8	384×288, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$5,899.00
PH35L 2.0	1700m	7.53° × 5.65°	2.96 - 23.68, x8	384×288, 12 μm NETD < 20mK	\$4,999.00



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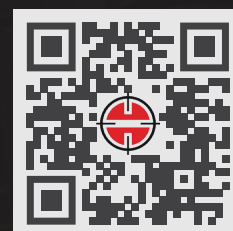
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UoVISION SELECT 30 4G LTE AJ25A SOLAR PANEL KIT

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

The well-camouflaged
camera in place

A lot of the time a cellular trail camera sounds like a really good idea. Then the realities of consistent reception, reliability and the higher battery consumption can take the shine off the idea a little bit

This system from Allan Foot at AJ Productions is the complete opposite, once set up properly it has given me flawless performance all year long.

This review follows on from the UoVision UM595 Cloud 3G reviewed in Issue 86, another of Allan's products. I'd love to report back on how it's going now a couple of years down the track, but someone pinched it! Regardless, the select 4G is a great step up, both in performance and specifications. It uses the same front-facing screen that I love.

It has great camera capability. The 30MP camera provides sharp imagery, and the invisible "Black Flash" (940nm) LEDs for night-time recording provide great rendition on pitch black nights. It can also record 4K, 2.7K, 1080p, 720p and WVGA video footage with sound.

There are the now-standard photo options like multi-burst, photo/video combo and a fast 0.2s trigger. As well as several features I didn't make use of like password protection, selectable Start-Stop operating period (I used the default 24/7 operating period, but if battery was an issue this would have been useful) and long range detection mode. It also comes with a two-year warranty and has a weatherproof rating of IP66.

CELLULAR

The biggest step up for this new camera is an AU chip module that includes the FDD LTE 4G (B28) 700MHz frequency to give better network coverage nation-wide when using Vodafone, Spark, or 2-Degrees.

Just like your phone it can still utilise 2 and 3G signal where 4G isn't supported by the surrounding towers. Even within 2,3 and 4G there are different bands, but the good news is the 4G LTE supports 9 of them. For more info on bands refer to the review in Issue 86.

The 4G reception allows for much quicker upload times, up to 10 seconds with this unit, whereas the 3G required at least 30 seconds, often a minute in poor reception. The quick upload uses less battery, but perhaps more importantly the quick upload times provide a better security feature. By the time a poacher/thief had noticed the 3G camera they had time to unplug it before the image was sent, they'd have to move pretty quickly to do the same with the 4G. No that's not how I lost my one, I set it up somewhere

with no reception. Foolish move with an expensive camera, even if it was on private land!

Obviously you need a SIM card to connect to your network of choice. I went with Spark this time as it has more reliable 4G reception in the places I had planned. The \$20 pre-paid SIM has lasted for hundreds of photos over the course of the year, so they're very economical.

APP

The photos are uploaded to the free LinckEazi app on your phone. The big upgrade since the last review is that now, via this app, you can command the camera remotely to take an image, great if you want to check the weather! You can also adjust camera mode, trigger mode, work time, send mode and the remote control delay remotely as well. It also tracks your battery capacity as well as signal and SD Card space. The SD card space is enormous, compatible with cards up to 256 GB, so paired with the solar panel this camera could be self-sufficient for years on end. One drawback is that the free plan only stores photos and images for 10 days on the app. This was ample though, I always saved the ones of interest to my phone and let it delete things as it wished. The only nuisance was coming out from a long TV Show trip and knowing four days of imagery had been deleted before I could have a look. If it became a problem, simply pay for the premium plan for \$3 a month.

It will send low res versions of any image,

and you can download the 30MB versions when you check the SD Card. However it can only send videos if you record in 1080p, 720p or WVGA, it doesn't have the capacity to reformat 4 or 2.7K to send via cellular data. It will send you a screenshot though so that you know the camera has been triggered.

ANTENNA

Another of Allan's products I added was the UOVision Booster Antenna-B, a must for most placements of cellular camera. The 9 dBi High Gain 3G/4G LTE Omni Directional antenna provides additional signal boost by up to 3 bars. The better the reception the quicker and more reliable the uploads will be. It has a 450mm antenna, and 3m of cable so you can string it well up a tree to get maximum effect.

Using the extended aerial I went from an iffy two bars of reception to four. With this system I haven't missed a single upload, everything I saw on the SD card corresponded to notifications I'd got. Which isn't always the case, with poor reception you can often check the SD card and curse as you've missed animals

SOLAR PANEL

Now it's time to talk about the solar panel – this is a heck of a unit in its own right and has massive application outside just running a trail cam. With the huge 25,000 mAh battery it is a sizeable powerbank. The 10W panel appears to charge it very quickly, and it's so effective that I'd seriously consider taking it for big basecamp trips like a tahr ballot. You could leave the powerbank charging up at camp and know that even snow won't harm it while you're out hunting.

Using this replaced the 12 AA batteries I would otherwise need. Allan suggested using some in case the powerbank ever ran dry from insufficient charging, but it never even came close. It ran all winter with barely a dip in power.

The panel features a USB port (5V) for pre-charging the internal battery before field use, as well as three external power outlet ports for 6V, 9V and 12V plus USB type "A" and "C" for charging other electronic devices such as cellular phones, iPad, Laptops etc. It matches the camera with a weatherproof rating of IP66 and measures 270mm x 260mm x 60mm deep.

It has a five position LED battery indicator and includes the trail camera tree mount as part of the package, this allows you to tilt it for best sun exposure.

It was great to be able to review this product over a decent amount of time. It is understandable that importers want their items promoted as soon as possible as they've often just landed large shipments of product, **so a big thank you to Allan for allowing us a thorough review. The system certainly passed with flying colours.**



The front facing screen is brilliant, allowing easy and accurate positioning of the camera



Allan's solar panels are a superb addition. 25,000mAh powerbank and 10W solar panel combined in an IP66 rated unit



Night or day, pigs or deer, the camera performed flawlessly. If only we did as well, that pig is still running!

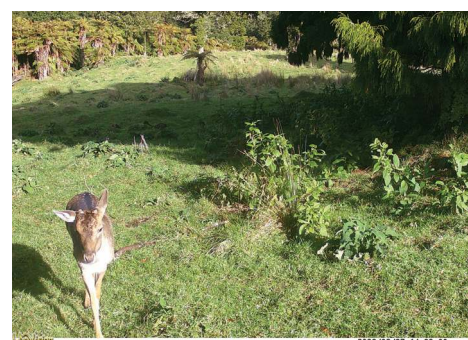


Photo Gallery

The winning photo receives a Hunting & Fishing voucher to the value of \$100. Send all your photos to editor@nzhunter.co.nz

Note: Photos must be of a suitable size for printing - a minimum file size of 1MB is preferred.



Grand Winner

Kloe Freeman (13) has spent the past 5 months trying to get herself a trophy goat head - she is thrilled!



Van Christmas with his first ever Red stag. A great evening spent with his brother Charlie and Grandad Colin in National Park



Cole Blair (8) with his first deer, a Fallow, taken with Tikka 223 at Waitotara



Toby Welsh (10) shot this rabbit using the Ruger 22



Lucy Schick's (11) first shot at a deer and nailed it! In Waikawau



Proud Dad with daughter Asha Bully packing out the meat in her trackpants



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NEW ZEALAND

Jake Scranney and his first ever stag a great seven pointer taken with a 6.5 Creedmoor



Hayden Whinn (13) shot his personal best boar weighing in at 87lbs

Benjamin Wood - First deer shot with his Uncle's Tikka 270



Will Blakely (12) with a 14 pointer shot using a 25-06



Ben Ireland with a Fallow buck shot with a 28 Nosler

MOLESWORTH GOOSE HUNT PREDICTABLY UNPREDICTABLE!

WRITTEN BY
TRACEY MORROW

It only takes one trip to the Molesworth Goose Hunt to realise you can predict only one thing about this place – that it is always unfailingly unpredictable in every single way. The block you draw, the weather you start in on, the birds, the hunting, the photographs you get, the weather you hunt in, the scenery, the weather you pack up in and the weather you drive out in. Molesworth can and always throws everything at you, so you must go prepared

In the spring of 2015 our group drew the Upper Wairau Block. With little personal knowledge of the area and even less of the history of Molesworth Station, I was simply a participant, not a hunter, but a photographer and a goose hunt groupy!

I thought, hell yeah, I will tag along,. It will be a bit of an adventure, a break away, see something new, take some photos, and see what my son is up to on these goosing weekends. One visit and I was hooked, drawn in, permanently addicted to this amazing place, it's other-worldly environment and hunting the mighty Canada Goose.

That spring hunt delivered only 30 odd birds, all four seasons and a love affair with this big country that will

never waver. Arriving at the Island Gully Hut, armpit high in big red tussock on a terrace overlooking the valley, this girl was immensely relieved to see a long drop standing alone on the edge of the terrace with a view to die for! It's not often a woman is relieved to see a long drop, but hey, in the Molesworth, that's a pretty sight for sure. It is the first and only time in Molesworth I have had the comfort of sleeping in a hut, although on the second night, I wondered if Holly, Hunter and I, and the hut might end up somewhere further down the line as a howling wind tore down the valley and rattled that roof and what seemed like the whole world all night and morning long. By dawn, as the few of us left in camp tried to resurrect the camp kitchen tent, I understood why the roof of both the hut and the loo were cabled and pegged into the ground with massive metal rods.



Tarn spread near Island Gully Hut

We hunted out of an A-frame blind and layouts on the tarn in a haze of huge golden red tussock and bare-faced hills, down on the braided river beds and further up the valley. **The birds were high and hard, but the few we got were well-earned and rewarding.** The final tally seemed a little disappointing but was about right for the numbers that block normally produces at that time of year. As a newbie to this goose-hunting lark, I quickly realised that a lot of effort on the part of the hunter can never guarantee results, especially in a remote location where the luxury of scouting before a hunt is not always an option.

On the third day, while waiting on a hot dry afternoon to head out for the evening hunt, I sat and watched massive sheets of dust literally peel off the mountainsides as the wind hurtled down the valleys. By the next morning, it was raining, cold and snowing lightly high in the hills. **We had gone from baking hot shorts and T-shirt weather to four layers of warmth, thermal socks and beanies.** The lesson in Molesworth's unpredictability began and I realised that no matter how this territory looks on a good day it can be a whole different ballgame on a bad day. Similarly, no matter how good the hunting one day, the next may produce not a single bird.



Tussock country at Island Gully Hut camp

It was a whole year before I got back, but in 2016 I made it to the spring hunt again, this time on the Guide Block. Camp was set up above the river, tucked into the side of the terrace for shelter. Everyone who heads into Molesworth knows that shelter is key, whether from the sun, the wind, the rain or the snow. On almost an exact repeat of the previous year, this high country threw us a hard-ball of all seasons.

The first evening shoot had a group of five of us hunting on the river bed with a few willows for cover. It was a beautiful evening hunt under a clear sky with a few decoys set just off the waterline and a few

feeders up on the gravel edge.

Gerry, Gandolph and Steve picked off nice pairs and single birds trafficking the river until well after twilight with not so much as a breeze for company. **The birds were often difficult to pick out against the rocky banks and hills, and are perfectly camouflaged in the Molesworth landscape.** A river runner had us in hysterics as it floated down through the decoys, perfectly still and almost out of range by the time anyone realised that old Sentry Sam was no decoy.

The next morning several smaller



The Guide crew and hunting spoils



Ridge runners in the Redgate Block



Spring Tarn hunting on the Hossack block

hunting groups headed off in different directions producing a few birds at each location. After a quiet morning, lunchtime produced a bit of excitement. **The young birds always tend to be a bit stupid at this time of year.** Spring fever or perhaps it was Saturday Night Fever - we had young birds, who had spotted a few random decoys left near the trailers and vehicles and decided to get a little closer. Hunter and Callum hit the sweet notes on the calls and suddenly, they were cupped up and coming in. A few shots were fired, and a few birds were on the deck. There were other birds who weren't exactly put off by the camp and served as light entertainment in between hunts.

The evening shoot was full of promise. Go to the Nightclub they said, it'll be fun they said, there are always birds they said! From memory, the Nightclub (spot X up river from camp), which normally has birds in abundance, did not produce a single bird. It was a Dance of the Desperate as a lot of work carrying gear across the river (and back) and grassing up blinds by everyone produced a woeful night. Back to camp with our dancing shoes on hold we lit up the brazier, tucked into a good meal and drowned our sorrows with a couple of well-earned drinks and tales of what might have been at the Nightclub.

In typical Molesworth fashion, we woke the next morning to a whole new weather experience – a massive drop in temperature that continued throughout the day, constant drizzle and rain and a lowering snow line that had Bridget, Holly and I hunkered down in camp for the best part of the day. The brazier stayed lit and well-stoked and all we could shoot was the breeze. **I learnt a big lesson on that trip about the unpredictability of this often unforgiving landscape.**

Never go under prepared! It got cold, stayed cold and got colder. I prefer the colder temperatures to the heat, but up there, when it's cold, it's bone chilling to the core. I had not taken enough warm bedding and, despite the layers of clothing (like every piece of clothing), everything was cold. Thank goodness I had the Labrador to snuggle up to. Without her, I would barely have slept. I woke in the night to the sound of snowfall plopping on the tent, and the morning dawned a whiteout. I remember logging into my mental Molesworth notes...."go over prepared".

As fast as the cold came, it retreated. The snow melted and everyone was back out hunting. The last evening shoot was light but produced some nice birds moving along the river. Some of the guys headed off alone or in pairs and picked up a few last birds. **Patrick shot his first goose, and all was right with the world.**



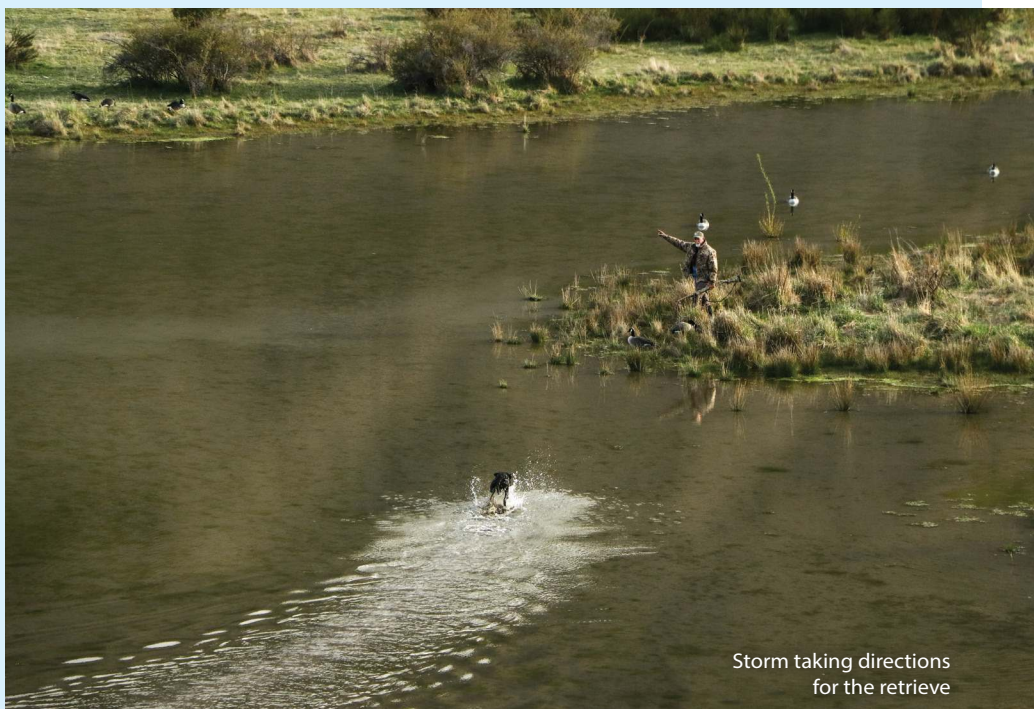
Crossing the Acheron in
Gerry's Hilux

While thinking I would make every Goose Hunt to the big country, work always got in the way. I missed spring of 2017, but Brett, our good mate Aaron and I decided to commit to the winter hunt that year, a first for us. It turned out to be Redgate, a block we had heard much about but had never been to. It is perhaps the most memorable and photographically sublime hunt for me on the Molesworth to date.

Heavy snow had fallen for several days before the trip. The weather had cleared, the snow partially thawed in places and refrozen, forming a white crunchy coating over almost everything. The road was reasonably clear by the time we hit it, and getting in there proved easier than we thought. It is the only hunt I have been on where the weather was totally consistent. Clear sunny days every day, massive frosts and temperatures down to -19°C . Redgate tarn was completely frozen over and resembled an ice skating rink. The entire landscape was breathtaking in its almost monotone beauty.

This time I went well prepared. Two sleeping bags (double bagged) and several woollen blankets, a thick well insulated sleeping mattress, plenty of layers and serious technical hunting clothing and a bag full of hand and toe warmers. **Well prepared I was, but man, was it cold at night!**

I don't hunt with a shotgun, I hunt with my camera. In all my days, I do not think I will ever forget the visual feast that the second night hunt produced. The light in the high country is truly special. Clear days, combined with a rising full moon over the mountains just on twilight,



Storm taking directions
for the retrieve

collided to create an epic evening shoot with all the prime elements. We had not seen a great deal of activity from the birds until sunset when suddenly there were a lot of birds on the move, both parries and geese. I had never ever heard any of the guys speak highly or even favourably about hunting on a full moon, not ever, so I was not at all hopeful of a productive hunt or any photographs!!! But, that night was to prove that, yet again, there is nothing predictable about hunting Molesworth.

As a full moon rose up to our right over the mountains, the entire sky was lit otherworldly shades of blue, purple and pink. While lying in

our horizontal layout blinds, we gazed transfixed at a view that we may never see again. Photographs I took had everyone convinced I had done some very clever Photoshop work. **It still blows me away to this day that this was real.**

While wow-ing at the view birds began to come at us out of nowhere. The frozen Redgate tarn was now lit up like a runway landing strip under the glow of a big full moon and they were totally intent and committed to coming into the decoys, sitting frozen on and into the ice. There were five shooters that night, two dogs on retrieve and not much calling required. Each shooter bagged a handful of birds,



Late light views waiting for Hossack evening flights

and that was enough. I think the greatest pleasure was in watching those birds literally drop into a shaft of moonlight and having to shoot almost blind between the contrast of light and dark. Steve's dog Storm was on fire that night and worked tirelessly, breaking through thinner ice to get out to the middle on solid ice to retrieve the birds in a combination of sliding, gliding and 360'ing techniques. How she didn't damage her legs is beyond me. By the end of the night, she was literally dancing with the stars.

We left the night's haul on ice and headed back to camp, buzzing from a very memorable hunt.

The rest of that trip was both frustrating and rewarding. Morning hunts were not as productive as the evening hunts, and the clear weather meant a lot of birds in large groups running the ridges and flying very high. Another team next to us had an epic river shoot one morning, taking over 70 birds in a few hours.

Having missed the winter hunt the following year, I decided to go on the spring hunt myself. With neither of my menfolk able to come, I thought,

what the hell, I'll go anyway, besides, someone has to keep my gal-pal Bridget company. So off I went into the great unknown with six others in our party to the Opposite Hossack Block for another round of Molesworth magic. **Sure enough and true to form, this spring hunt produced all four seasons.**

The forecast was somewhat foreboding. The nearby St James hunt was cancelled due to the formidable snow and storm warning. After our usual breakfast catchup in Hanmer Springs, the team drove in in convoy in swirling mist to a beautiful little campsite tucked into a terrace circled in willows. The afternoon was warm and perfect for setting up camp, and my dummy run at home on putting up the new tent meant I got the job done without too much fuss. **By afternoon, the wind was starting to pick up.**

We decided to take two vehicles across the Clarence River and up to the two tarns on the terrace above, feeling confident that no rain was due just yet. Ian, Steve, Patrick, Bridget and I hunted the smaller tarn closest to camp, while Gerry and Gandolph headed further upriver to the larger tarn. They cleaned up that night,

taking 25 birds in a couple of hours. The guys in our group took some lovely birds arriving high out of a valley to the northwest and circuiting the tarn several times as they reduced altitude to drop in. With fading light, larger groups were trafficking the river below, so the few birds that turned up tarn side were a bonus. We left our layout blinds at the tarn, pushing them back under cover in case the weather turned. It was late getting back to camp, but we were all pretty amped for the next few days hunting based on that first night out.

In classic Molesworth fashion, and right on cue the weather turned. By first light Friday, it was sleeting heavily at camp and snowing up high. The temperature was tumbling, and the river rising from overnight rain. While we all love goose hunting, most of us are of an age where the choice between venturing out in that kind of weather and staying put with the fire going and hot tucker on tap was a no-brainer. By 11am it was bucketing down with snow, and it just kept on coming. Big, beautiful snowflakes settling on the ground and no sign of stopping. **We woke to sleet and went to sleep with snow still falling.**

Saturday proved to be a real cracker. Still snowing lightly on waking, the first job was to clear the tent, car and awning of about ten centimetres of snow. By mid-morning, the storm seemed to be clearing, and wee pockets of blue sky were appearing. The river hadn't risen as much as we thought it might, but we decided to take just one vehicle, Gerry's mighty Hilux, across the river in two trips. With plenty of food and thermos full we headed off into a blue sky and sun for an



Minus 14 degrees and counting - Redgate

afternoon/evening hunt.

We left the vehicle a lot closer to camp this time and walked in as the blinds and decoys were still (hopefully) where we left them. The snow was starting to melt off in the midday sun. As we approached the first tarn, we could see birds amongst the decoys. Approximately 25 birds were on the water but started to move off as we got closer. Ian and Patrick took out a couple of birds from the initial sitters.

Not long after getting settled into the blinds it seemed quiet, so I decided to head out for a walk, and take a few photos of the set-up and the blinds on the tarn edge. As is

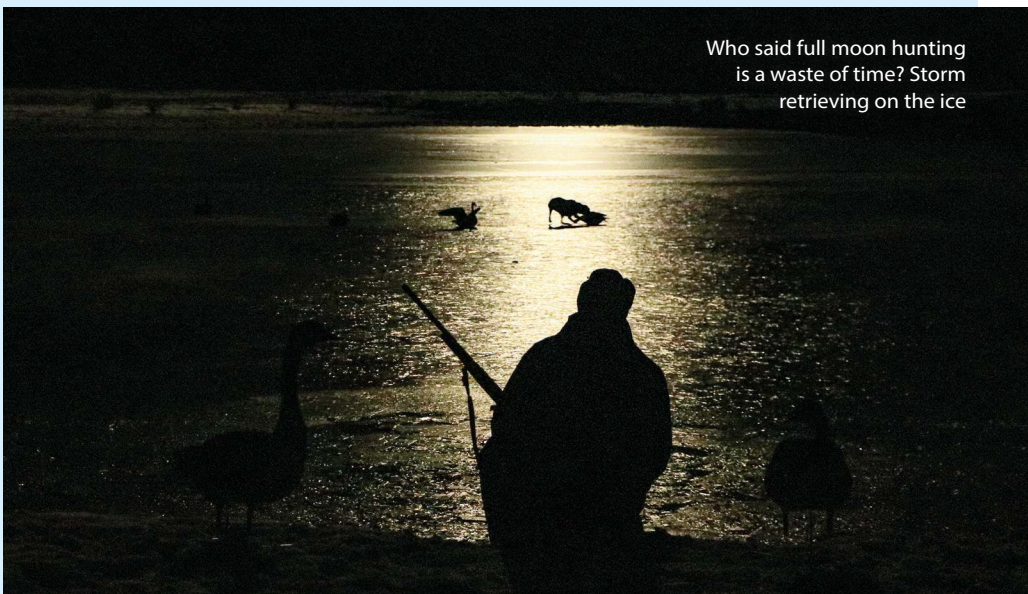
always predictable, the minute you get out of the blind, pour a cup of coffee, put the bacon on or change out the decoy spread, birds arrive. I quickly yelled out so the shooters knew where I was and hunkered down behind a hefty briar bush. For the first time ever, well camouflaged and out of the sun flare, I was well hidden and could photograph birds, lit with the sun and circling around and around and around the tarn as they were dropping in from a great height. It was absolute magic, and as the first shots rang out, I watched the birds' reactions through the zoom lens and peeled off a million camera clicks.

It was all go and then went very quiet. The change in the weather back to sun and clear sky got the birds moving for about an hour. The afternoon stretched out quietly and without any excitement. The odd barrage of shots from the boys further up the river had us remaining forever hopeful, but little happened until that golden hour when the sun dropped below the horizon, the light is ridiculously good, and the birds make their move. The bigger tarn was the place to be that night, and the boys had an awesome hunt. We took birds in ones and twos on twilight and just after dark. With virtually no calling, pairs seemed just literally to arrive from every direction. In poor light, shooting successfully is always a 50/50 chance and the dogs were heavily reliant on scent alone for retrieving.

Due to weather, we only achieved two hunts out of a possible four but still managed 77 birds for that block. Due to a few transportation hiccups, we were late leaving camp, but none of us really cared as the Sunday was sunny and scenic. Another Molesworth expedition is complete and the SD cards in the camera full of scenic and goose overload. While it wasn't quite the same without my boys on board, I was so pleased I had just committed and made the trip on my own.



Decoys set solid waiting for the morning sun at Redgate



Who said full moon hunting is a waste of time? Storm retrieving on the ice



Winter hunting requires hot brews and lots of layers

Molesworth is a very special place and the Goose Hunt is a ridiculously good time every time. It's never really about how many birds were taken for anyone, but for me, it presents an opportunity to completely escape from the madness of everyday life, to hunt for images with the camera, to catch up with the hunting buddies and create some more campfire memories. It is the most unpredictable environment I have

ever been in, but the one thing you can always be sure of with Molesworth is that you will walk away with images of an outstanding landscape firmly imprinted on your mind, **great memories of camp camaraderie and the haunting echoes of those high country honkers calling out as they fly down those rivers and valleys under the light of a full moon.**



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GOAT RACK & HERB SALSA

WRITTEN BY ~ DARIUSH LOLAY | CAZADOR

INGREDIENTS

- 1 x 8 bone rack of goat
- 2 Teaspoon flakey salt
- Pinch black pepper
- 50ml dry oloeroso sherry
- 50ml chicken stock
- 1 knob butter (unsalted)
- 80g almonds, toasted and chopped
- 80g pine nuts, toasted and chopped
- 1 Tablespoon mint, chopped
- 1 Tablespoon parsley, chopped
- 1 Tablespoon chives, chopped
- Good olive oil to finish
- Juice of one lemon

Servings: 4

Prepping Time: 5 min

Cooking Time: 10 min



PREP

Season the rack liberally with 1 teaspoon of flakey salt, and a few cracks of black pepper.

Sear the goat rack in a hot pan with a little fat to achieve caramelisation on all sides. Once the meat has caramelised transfer it to a 200 degree oven for a three minutes. Cook it medium rare (approximately 42 degrees on a digital thermometer).

Remove the meat from the pan, deglaze the pan with the sherry and stock, then knock in the butter to make a pan sauce. Allow the meat to rest for ten minutes, loosely covered with tin foil in a warm spot.

Make the salsa by mixing the chopped nuts, olive oil and chopped herbs in a large mortar and pestle, add lemon juice and remaining salt to taste.

TO SERVE

Slice the goat along the rib bones, dress with the pan sauce and garnish with the herb salsa. This dish is lovely with boiled potato salad in summer or truffled polenta in winter.



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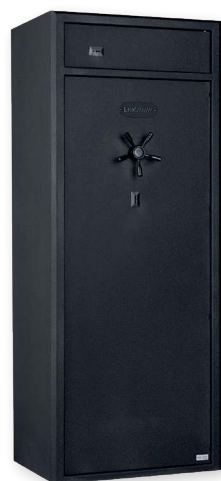


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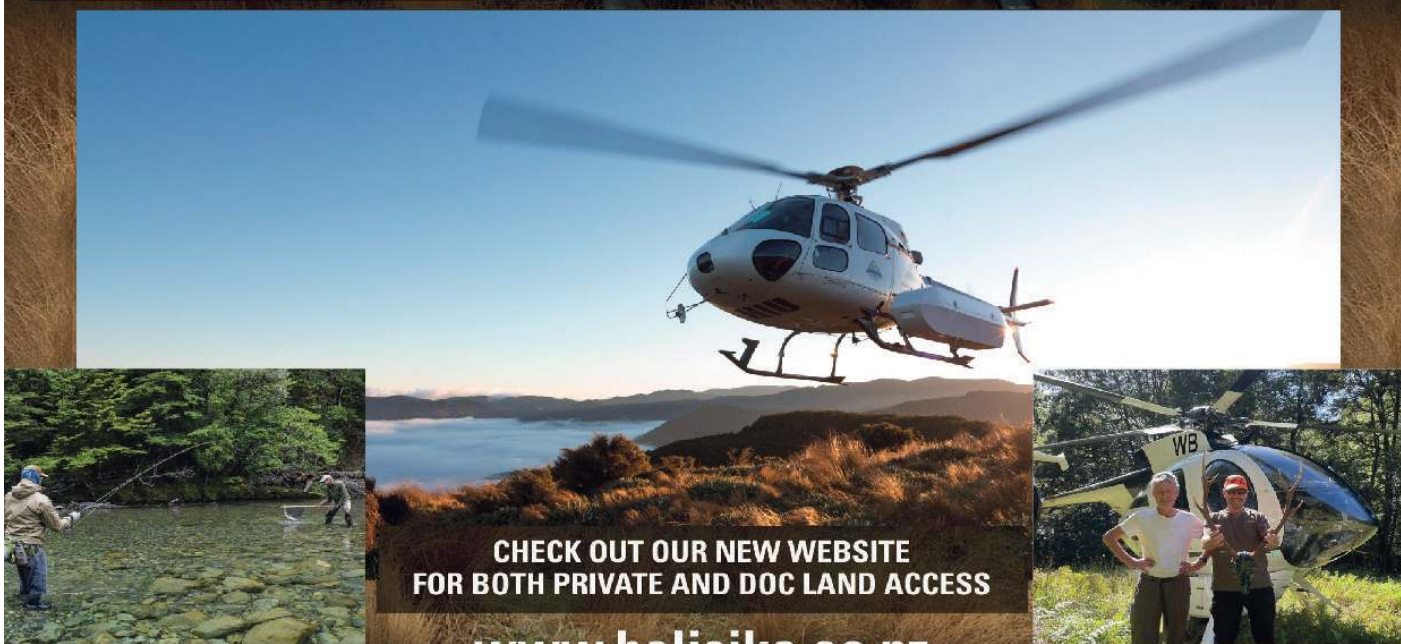
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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

PART 2

SO, YOU WANT TO SMOKE?

By now, you may have decided on the type of BBQ you want or be considering your options

Perhaps the new one is sitting outside, waiting for better weather and its first use. In this article I'm going to cover some of the most frequently asked questions and the tools that might be required, techniques, terminologies, and why spritzing is important.

TOOLS REQUIRED

Spray bottle for spritzing: Most garden centres will have these for internal house plants, and you don't need an expensive one.

THERMOMETER: you will generally require two;

it's important to have a thermometer that can measure internal meat temperatures. A thermometer that uses Wi-Fi is ideal because it allows you to monitor what's happening inside the smoker while cooking large cuts of meat. Additionally, it can measure the air temperature in the smoker. Some models come with four or more probes, enabling you to cook multiple types of meat simultaneously and monitor their individual temperatures. Your phone will alert you once each piece of meat has reached your desired temperature.

The second can be used for an instant

read - a fold-out type for quick checking of temperature. This gives a guide to the tenderness as you place the probe into the meat to check the temperature over the joint.

CHIMNEY STARTER: used for charcoal cookers.

HEAT-RESISTANT GLOVES: things will get hot, either meat that you are cooking and slicing, or trays or the racks.

TONGS: preferably long-handled as you will need to shift meat around. They can also be used to move trays or racks and retrieve that last chicken nibble or rabbit leg at the back of the grill.

BRUSH OR A MOP: for glazing the meat while cooking.

WIRE GRILL BRUSH: for keeping your smoker clean either before or after use.

HEAVY-DUTY TIN FOIL: used for wrapping and for making boats.

BUTCHERS OR PEACH PAPER: for wrapping up meat while cooking or resting.

SHARP KNIFE: I recommend a longer knife for carving as this will be helpful for slicing brisket and ribs.

CHOPPING BOARD: for carving the selected meat

TECHNIQUE

Following a recipe with the correct temperature is crucial for achieving the desired outcomes. If you are unable to control the temperature on your smoker, the final product may not turn out the way you want it. Whether it's too hot or too cold, the temperature control is essential to achieving the desired results. The type of meat that you are cooking will differ: chicken nibbles, beef brisket and pork ribs require different techniques, so be sure to follow the recipe carefully. After a while, you will be able to work out the sweet spot for your cooker as each model is different. The shelf position for each type of meat is also key. Time and temperature play a significant role and go hand in hand. **Some meats need hot and fast and some not so, and unless you have a digital electric cooker with a thermostat then controlling the temperature will be paramount.** It's important to understand the machine that you have purchased and control the airflow. Don't lift the lid to see what's happening all the time, as this loses heat and smoke, two key factors in BBQ cooking. If you're going to lift the lid, then do a multitude of things at once, such as attend to the water pan, spritz or check the food. Different woods have different flavours, so it is best to check out the flavour profile of each. There are strong and mild flavours so you will need to match accordingly.

SPRITZING

Spritzing is spraying liquid quickly in short bursts and is a common technique on the BBQ. You are spraying the meat with a mixture - usually apple juice or cider vinegar mixed with water - at regular intervals while cooking or smoking. You may also use ingredients such as beer or whisky. Spritzing imparts moisture and flavour, can help create that visible pink smoke ring on the sliced meat, and impressive looking bark. Spritzing keeps the exterior of the meat moist so that the smoke can penetrate the meat to cook and flavour it. If the meat is dry then the smoke can't penetrate the meat and add the flavour you are after.

TERMINOLOGY

BARK: The dark crust on the outside of meat comes from the rub when smoking.

BLUE SMOKE: this is the optimal colour for smoke cooking. Not the dirty black smoke, but when the smoke coming off the flame is blue and therefore nice and clean.

BOATING: where you use a foil tray to cook your meat and contain the cooking juices, and covered with foil. Alternatively you can make a boat with heavy-duty foil to

wrap the meat, thus providing liquid or moisture retention.

BRINE: a mixture of salt and water or other flavourings to bathe your meat in before cooking to keep it moist while cooking, or to impart flavour by using a syringe.

BRIQUETTES: a compressed block of coal or other biomass material used for fuel to heat and flavour the BBQ. They generally burn longer than lump wood charcoal so if you are after a long burn of eight hours or more, then this could be a good option.

FAT CAP: the thick layer of fat on top of the meat and under the skin (beautiful!)

REVERSE SEAR: searing the meat at the end of the cooking rather than at the start resulting in slow cooked meat sealed on a hot grill and served, such as a Tomahawk steak. Generally, the interior meat is cooked more uniformly with less shrinkage and stays moist while cooking and is therefore more tender.

SEASONING: usually with salt and or

pepper, a rub, or herbs and spices.

SEASONING YOUR SMOKER: Smoking up your BBQ for the first time for a short time without food, before putting it into use. This burns off any factory grease that may be present.

SMOKE RING: the pink layer of meat below the exterior bark on large joints that shows when sliced. In the BBQ world, the smoke ring is one of the sought-after results and definer of smoked meat.

To quote Clement Freud "To BBQ is a way of life rather than a desirable method of cooking"

This will come as no surprise to anyone, but the Fourth of July is the most popular American holiday for dusting off the BBQ - 73% of the nation celebrates with a BBQ ! That's 225 million people – on one weekend BBQing!

GENERAL PURPOSE RUB

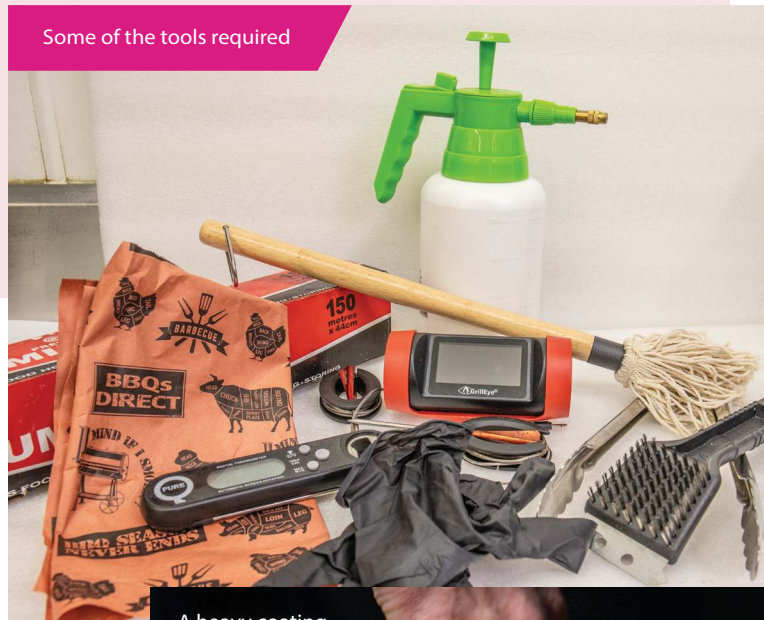
- 4 Tbsp brown sugar
- 3 Tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 Tbsp salt
- 1 Tbsp garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp onion powder
- 1 tsp mustard powder
- 1 tsp chilli powder or more if desired
- 10 to 12 grinds of the black pepper mill

Method

Sieve all ingredients several times or mix by hand until well combined. Place in an airtight container in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight – (a storeroom or cupboard) DO NOT refrigerate.

It's the brown sugar in rubs that caramelises when the heat hits, which helps the spice cling to the meat. Rubs define a good piece of meat along with the smoke and love that has been put into the cooking of it, adding a flavour that would otherwise be lacking. My brother-in-law says, "Why make it when you can buy it?", and sometimes this is true as there are so very many good rubs on the market. I have my go-to when we smoke, both at work and at home, and some of the New Zealand made rubs are fantastic so I recommend that you try the small containers for several reasons. Firstly, that it will stay fresher as you will use it more quickly, and secondly, it will be cheaper. If you find that you don't like the flavour profile, then you don't have a lot to use up, and if you do like it, then purchase a larger container. Lastly, you won't be fighting for space in the pantry with you-know-who with all your new rubs!!

Some of the tools required



A heavy coating of the general purpose rub



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